Sunday Morning, 7 A.M.
a year of Sundays
GARTH POORMAN

In memory of

Dad

And I may be obliged to defend
Every love, every ending
Or maybe there's no obligations now
Maybe I've a reason to believe
We all will be received
In Graceland

Spring

April 6, 2025

Good morning, Dad.

It's foggy this morning, and—compared to most Sundays—my energy's a little low. Didn't get as much sleep as usual. Who's to blame? This guy.

First official Sunday of April, I guess. Overcast, so no blue sky to frame all the flowering trees and early spring color. But I'll have *One-Trick Pony* in my earholes, and I'll have these steps around campus, so that's something.

It doesn't quite feel like a full week since I was here on Wednesday. I took that picture of the plaque on that tree in memory of the Snipes. Looked into it – Howard Snipes went to Haverford, met his future wife teaching at Friends' Central. They were still in their twenties. Got married in September of '89, went on a long honeymoon, and were about to take a sabbatical year to work for Habitat for Humanity.

And then—driving across Wyoming in November, on icy roads—they hit a snowplow. Both died.

That is just…grim. Fucking grim.

They would have been about 26. And here I am, twice that age, waking up on a Sunday, taking so much for granted—my job, this walk, the beauty of Haverford.

It's all so precious because it's so limited, and yet we don't live like that. Not really. I don't think the mind is wired to live in constant appreciation.

What else. Phillies off to a good start — 6–2 — but I'm still skeptical about their bats. They finish up a series with the Dodgers today. Sánchez on the hill, I think. I'd probably bet the Dodgers. They're 9–1.

Mom had a little fall—nothing serious, thankfully—at the Cricket Club after Robert's memorial service. No damage, but…yeah. It's a steady descent. Not too steep, but her mind isn't sharp anymore. She'll be 78 this year.

You never know, right? I mean, you never know with any of us. But at that age…things aren't exactly trending upward in the old noggin department.

Full week of work ahead. Some good things to look forward to—the Tuesday walk with the Lonely Island Bros. The Masters starting up, rounds Thursday through Sunday, all the pods and coverage. That'll be fun.

Patty and Rich are back, so that finally takes away my option to go to Gulf View—which is probably a good thing for this guy. Wasting away the hours there doesn't do me much good on weekend mornings.

Time to put on some Paul—my weekly ritual. And as always, you're along with me in spirit.

Love you, Dad.

April 20, 2025 – Easter Sunday

Happy Easter, Dad. He has risen – He has risen, indeed! That last word always makes me think of my old boss Simon—how he'd throw "indeed" into sentences like a posh British chap.

But you know me. I don't think he rose, whoever he was. And sadly, you're not rising from the dead today either. I don't think we'd want anyone to rise from the dead—it would be pretty horrifying for the people who saw it happen. Plus, you were cremated so … the logistics of that would be tough.

How did belief about physical resurrection take hold? In the ancient world, resurrections and miracles could be believed. In the world of scientific methods, not so much. It's obvious now that's not how things work. But I suppose religions aren't designed to tell us what's True, but instead what feels true. I'll give it a pass.

Yesterday we had a great time—well, mostly great. Mom, Tiff, Taylor, and I went out to Del and Keli's. Abby and David were there too. It was a lively gathering, as it always is out there in Sanatoga. Del organized an Easter egg hunt. In your honor, he hid one in a car tailpipe. It took us a while to find it, but it had a $20 bill for Taylor inside.

Toward the end of the evening things got a little heated. I didn't start it, but David and Abby got into talking politics, and Del jumped in. It turned into quite an argument—more intense than I've seen between them. The issue was the Trump administration's handling of international students—detentions and deportations that Abby says are hitting close to home for people she knows at Harvard and MIT.

Dell was giving his usual speech about how great America is for immigrants, and David and Abby were doing their best impersonation of me in my twenties—pointing out all of America's faults. I mostly stayed out of it and listened to the generational fissure play out.

Every generational gap has its tensions, often magnified by family dynamics. Not always, of course. I was going to say something about Don and your dad, but that's not quite right either—Don has a much stronger faith than your father did. Your dad, let's be honest, never seemed all that interested in religion, although he didn't shed its outer husk for appearance's sake. But Don has that more small "c" conservative temperament, and Abby and David… well, they clearly don't. So that was yesterday.

There's another Easter egg hunt today at 107 E. Montgomery. I'll probably go. Tiff and Taylor are going to recharge their social batteries and skip this one.

Easter. The high holiday of the Christian calendar. I used to look forward to Easter as a kid. But at that age I was uninterested in its theology. I didn't start wresting with Christian theology until I was in my early adulthood. That was my Jacob-wrestling-with-the-angel phase—say from about 22 to 27—trying to square what felt like a circle. Eventually I said, alright, I'm not going to wrestle with this anymore. I'll find my own way to experience beauty and awe in the world, try to treat people with kindness and warmth, and be okay with the uncertainty.

For the most part, I think I've done a decent job. With some ups and downs, ins and outs—a lot of what-have-yous.

What I ended up wrestling with was the addictive side of my own nature. Which, you know… took some things, taught some things. *Took some things, taught some things*. That's got a nice ring to it.

Yesterday I heard a song from the early '70s by a Scottish singer named John Martyn, and it's been stuck in my head ever since:

"May you never lay your head down without a hand to hold…"

Something like that. It's ringing in my ears, and I can't get it out. In some ways it reminds me of Aaron—kind of like how "Desperado" always makes you think of him. Martyn had his own struggles too: heroin, drinking, a temper. Everyone has their journey.

Oh—look at that. A beautiful little finch just hopped up nearby.

And speaking of music… it's about that time. The rhythm and the rhyme. Today is Paul Simon's Graceland. I swear I didn't plan this. Paul Simon's Graceland on Easter morning. Come on. You can't beat that.

The flowering trees are out. The lilacs are blooming. Birds are flitting everywhere. The temperature's pushing 70 degrees. I'm caffeinated. I've got all the time in the world to take this walk. Let's fucking go.

Love you, Dad.

April 27, 2025

Good morning, Dad.

The sky is painted blue this morning. It's early—about a half hour earlier than usual. Seven o'clock almost on the dot. Nope, 6:56 am. The Sunday after Easter, Penn Relays weekend, the Sunday after Arbor Day—one of my favorite weeks of the year. It didn't disappoint. I took lots of walks, got absolutely robbed at Midas with my car inspection, but what am I going to do? The car passed inspection and is on the road for another year—the 2014 Camry. Let's see how long I can keep it going.

Work's been good. I'm enjoying it, which still feels worth noting. This week I've been listening to Bill Bryson—you've probably listened to one or two of his audiobooks before. I'm enjoying "One Summer: America, 1927". That summer was 98 years ago now, and it's testing my theory that once you get about a hundred years removed, you really can't inhabit how people related to current events anymore. Everything was just too different.

For example, a 51-year-old in 1925 would've been born in 1873. That's older than all my great-grandparents, except maybe Charters Rainey—and none of us even really knew him. I can't even begin to get into Wilbur Plugge's mindset, and he wasn't even 30 in the Summer of 1927. Anyway—it's a great book. I'm enjoying it, and I'm enjoying my Newspapers.com subscription, too.

I've also been listening to "Rhythm of the Saints". It's an other-worldly album—written and released when Paul Simon was in his late 40s. That's the closest studio album he produced to the age I am now. It's about loss, about his father's illness, about love falling apart. It's about trying to be present. About spirit voices.

This week I was thinking about the "Through the Gates of Splendor" Spire comic book you bought Aaron and me when we were kids. Honestly—what the hell were those guys doing going down there trying to

reach “unreached tribes”? Insulated in their certainty about the necessity of Christian salvation, they were causing problems where there didn’t need to be any. The people were better off being left alone out in the Ecuadorian jungle. Still—people get compelled by their passions. Always have. There are a lot of passions out there, and a lot more people now—about double what there were when I was born. Four billion then. Eight billion now.

What’s on deck this week? Phoenixville baseball. They’ve stumbled to about .500, but I’m heading out to the former golf course to watch a game. Geoff’s throwing as a sophomore. We’ll see how they do. I’m grabbing a bite to eat with him afterward to get a download on how he’s feeling about the season.

I’m watching robins battling it out on the ground. Will I spot a Baltimore Oriole today? I don’t know. But if my membership still works, I’m taking my glasses tomorrow and heading out to Longwood Gardens for another long walking day.

Anyway—just checking in, as always. Love you.

May 4, 2025

Hey Dad, this is going to be a short one, but I got to keep up the tradition. May the Fourth be with you. It is cloudy with the threat of rain. I see dandelion stalks bereft of their flower. I have Paul Simon's colossal money loser on Broadway – “Songs from the Capeman” – on deck.

This week I went out to watch Geoff coach the fighting Phoenixville Phantoms. They won 6-1 over the Boyertown Bears. The two games after that on Wednesday and Friday they got shellacked. They are under .500 for the season, not great. Phillies, however, are over .500 and had a good week of baseball. They have won two series since they they stumbled.

As for me, I keep chugging along. I'm keeping my eyes on the prize – which is merely the Present. I had a nice day at Longwood. Since the rain is coming in, I'm going to cut this short. I miss you, as always, and you live on for me in these songs.

May 11, 2025

Good morning, Dad. May the 11th be with you—not the 4th. We’ve plugged along another seven days, and I’m here to report back. I’m early today—an hour and nine minutes to be exact. It’s 6:21, and it’s shaping up to be a beautiful Sunday. Yesterday was beautiful, too. There’s a bird perched on a piece of wood nearby—at first I thought it was a pileated woodpecker, but it’s not. Anyway, it’s pretty, a nice little distraction to start the morning.

Speaking of birds, I went to Bartram’s Garden yesterday afternoon because I still hadn’t seen a Baltimore Oriole this Spring. I saw Orioles there a few years ago at this same moment in Spring and sure enough,

boom, there they were again. A glorious little bird. Its vibrant colors never fail to stop me in my tracks. I saw both a male and a female, and it put me in wonderful spirits.

I also saw a groundhog—sometimes I think "hedgehog," but groundhog is the right name. They look exactly like what they're called. One of my favorite animals, honestly. They are enthusiastic denizens of cemeteries, where I often greet them as friends. Let's recap my favorite things to notice: Baltimore Orioles, Crows, Cedar Waxwings (which I almost never see), foxes of course, and groundhogs.

Music-wise, we're somewhere around 1999—Paul Simon's "You're the One". Paul was on the cusp of 60. Reflective Paul. Though let's be honest, Paul's always been reflective, even as a twenty-something. Still, you can feel mortality creeping in with these albums, even when he pretends it's not. By 1999, he was on the other side of the financial flop that was "The Capeman"—I still can't think of that album without singing *"ooh wa wa, ooh wa wa, ooh wa wa aaah"*. But "You're the One" and the albums that follow? They're fun. A little more experimental, maybe, but just as delightful for me, his lead apostle, as any other album in his career.

The band Counting Crows—who you knew nothing about—have gotten a lot of my attention this week. They put out a new album. They're the band Aaron and Claudia went to see on their second date in September 1997 in Los Angeles, which means they're partially responsible for your eldest grandson, Marco Sebastian Poorman. Boom. Father of his own now. Claudia sent a picture of little Marci last night, and we may be seeing her in the flesh come July at the Tennessee reunion. We're all going to be there, Dad. Adams, Tennessee. Be there or be square. I know you'd be pumped we are attending.

I've decided we're driving. Tennessee is a long drive, but it's manageable if broken up over two days. With four of us going it saves money and I get to be in control of our own destiny. We can even take an extra day coming back—maybe swing through Ohio, stop in Indiana, PA (where Tiff went to college), and make an outing of it.

Some good reading this week about a guy named Jesse Hill Ford. He was a southern writer who had a novel that got a lot of attention in the 1960s, then a few years later shot a black man—"by mistake," according to the courts. This happened in Tennessee, about 90 miles east of Memphis. I've been thinking about sending the story to David Alford, because he loves a good story.

I was also thinking about Schyler Agee yesterday. Something brought Keene, NH to mind. I'd seen a marker in Woodlands Cemetery for a woman named Mary—maiden name Mary Howard Sturgis—and that sent me down a research hole. Turns out she married into a prominent family and was likely from one herself. Boston people. Somehow connected to Robert Gould Shaw—the guy mythologized in the movie "Glory" who led that Black regiment in the Civil War.

I love my walks. I've got two great ones: Sunday mornings here at Haverford with Paul Simon, and Saturday mornings around Penn and into Woodland Cemetery, listening to old Desert Island Discs episodes with people who've died. Yesterday, I listened to the last episode ever recorded by Roy Plomley, the creator and original host. It was recorded two weeks before he died of a heart attack in 1985. He was interviewing an actress who grew up in Johannesburg and later moved to London. I love that stuff. Woodlands has a nighttime event coming up in June—I might check it out.

Today is Mother's Day. The woman who created it—Anna Jarvis, who finally got Woodrow Wilson to make it official in 1914—is buried in West Laurel. I've seen her grave many times. She came to hate Mother's Day

because it became instantly commercialized, and she even tried to get it rescinded. That effort failed. She ended up in a sanatorium in West Chester and died there. Meanwhile, Mother's Day lives on, louder and more commercial than ever.

Tonight, I'm cooking steak frites for the Foxes and for Mom, plus a gluten-free yellow cake with chocolate icing. Hopefully it'll be a nice night. Mom's been doing better the past couple of weeks. Kelly took her out on Thursday for Mother's Day and they had a good time. Let's hope the train keeps chugging.

May is a beautiful month. I know you'd miss it—if consciousness worked that way. But you're here through me. In my mind, my memories, my version of you.

I had a good idea this week, Dad. I've been thinking about doing another letter project—like the one I did in 2019. It's been six years. I want to write 52 letters, one per week for a year, to people who are dead. Maybe call it Questions I Can't Ask or Questions the Dead Can't Answer. Or simply Letters to the Dearly Departed. Boom.

I think the first letter has to be to someone who's been dead close to 100 years. I'm obsessed with that idea—what it means once someone's been gone that long. Nana Dot's grandfather D.H. Kincaid died in the early 1920s. Big Daddy's father died in the late 20s—1928 I think. Maybe one of them.

Time to walk. Me, Paul's music, your memory, Haverford College. Let's fucking go.

May 18, 2025

Good morning, Dad. "Pristine" is the word that comes to mind. It's a pristine Sunday morning. Dateline: 6:56 a.m. here at Haverford College. The squirrels are already at it. I parked a little farther down than usual, directly in front of the observatory—not adjacent. There are a few more cars in the lot this morning, which makes sense since yesterday was graduation.

The Haverford College Class of 2025 is officially heading out into the world—or on to further education. They had their ceremony inside the field house.

Yesterday, Tiff, Taylor and I walked something called the Trolley Trail. There used to be a small amusement park in Fairmount Park—still on its last legs by the 1910s and '20s, so Grandpa might've known about it. It closed in 1955. I wonder if you ever went. Now it's mostly woods, with the old trolley path still there. We did about half of it, grabbed Chick-fil-A on City Line, and then headed home. It was nice to get out. I also took a walk with Angela Sim in the morning.

What else is of note? Oh—Richard Kuhn died. Good old Richard Kuhn. Your generation of cousins—well, even though he wasn't a blood cousin—have lived long lives. You were the exception. You didn't quite make it to 75.

In a month and three days, you would have completed four score years and become an octogenarian. I thought of a title for an essay I'll probably never write. Or maybe I will. Writing about your lifespan through the lens of a baseball game—your innings. Eighty-one years would've meant nine innings, nine years apiece.

You didn't get to live your last inning. Nine years from your birthday this year would've been 2016—right when you were about to go on that walk with me. You started the top of the ninth but didn't finish it.

What was I interested in this week, research-wise? They are often empty "discovery" calories. Thoughts come and go. Nothing overly important to cling to. This week I'm listening to "Surprise", an album whose name I always forget because it's not a song title. Oh—there's a nice hawk overhead, and a half moon still hanging in the sky.

"Surprise" is the album Paul Eno collaborated on. Some good jams. Aren't they all? Paul's still out there touring—calling it a "quiet celebration."

Speaking of concerts, Rick is in Vegas. Rick went with Steve and his sons to see Dead & Company at the Sphere. He'd never been to Vegas before, so we've been texting. He does not like it. You wouldn't have liked it either. All you ever experienced was the airport, and that was plenty.

This coming week is Memorial Day, so I might get a half day on Friday. We're easing into summer now. Yesterday felt like it. Today probably will, too. The Phillies are playing good baseball, beating up on the Pirates—though today they face their Cy Young favorite ace.

I can't complain. I'm about to be *walkin' through the leaves falling from the trees, feeling like a stranger nobody needs. Stick with me, baby. Stick with me anyhow. Things start to get interesting right about now*. A little Bobby D.

I'm going to enjoy this day as much as I can. I'll talk to on the morrow week. Love you, Dad.

May 25, 2025

Good morning, Dad. I don't know if this is the last Sunday of May—it might be. It's the 25th. Let me say: May did not do me dirty today. It's been rainy, as May tends to be, but this morning? <chef's kiss> Sun, a few clouds, birds, shadows—all of it working together. Paul Simon, too. Beautiful.

I am thinking ahead, as I always do. So Beautiful or So What this week. Stranger to Stranger next week. Then I'm in D.C. the following week, and after that comes Seven Psalms. Somewhere in there I was imagining a Sunday where I head up to New York City for a full Paul Simon walking day. Or maybe I'll wait. We'll see.

In baseball news: the Phils have not lost since I last talked to you. They are winners of nine straight. Yes, against some lower-tier teams, but still—damn good baseball. Best record in the majors again, even with the closer getting suspended for 60 games and now being ineligible for the playoffs. Glass half full, right? They are swinging hot bats.

I think I'm going to a game with Tiff and Taylor for Father's Day against the Blue Jays. Only now did it hit me—the fucking Blue Jays. The World Series Game 5 we attended in 1993. Full circle. We won that one. The less said about the one that followed, the better.

I did some rabbit-holing this week around Hebron history. I remain obsessed with 1977. That was the year you turned 32—strong age, strong year. That's the year John got Buff. Lulu was our exchange student that

winter and spring. Nancy came back from Wisconsin. Big Daddy went to rehab, stayed with us, then got his own place. Graham died. Mom, Aaron, and I spent most of June and all of July in Tennessee. Steve Waite graduated. Lori Campbell graduated. Mama Freeland died. Life was happening—as it always is.

I was reading the 1977 Salem yearbook and looking through old Washington County Post stories, and man, it's wild. There's a hilarious 1983 letter Lori Weaver wrote to the Salem school board about the choice of high school musicals. You can't make this stuff up. I sent it to Aaron and we were laughing. It's been on my mind a lot lately—how memory can drastically differ from what I learn from primary-source research. The West Hebron of my childhood lives on in both. Some of those folks only live in memory now, some are still walking this earth. I hear the town is having a Hebron Day this year, in September. I'm not sure if I'll make it, but it's there, hovering as a possibility. But then again, you can't ever go back to what was, even if you go back to where it all took place.

Mom seems in better spirits. She spent all day yesterday with Raylyn and Anne getting ready for Raylyn's daughter's wedding, so she was perky. Today it's church, then we'll see her tomorrow for Memorial Day. I've decided we're driving to Tennessee in July. It's taking shape in my head now. You drove that route plenty of times, Dad. I won't fail you.

I've also been enjoying Dave Barry—your guy, Class of '69. He has a memoir out, and I'm listening to it on Spotify. First chapter is about his parents, and guess what: his dad was a Presbyterian minister. Rev. Barry headed up the New York Mission Society in the city, even though they lived a bit upstate. The memoir is well written. Balanced. Loving, but honest about his dad's struggles—alcoholism, depression, all of it. I'm looking forward to taking this book slow and savoring it.

Between Barry, finishing up my Bryson, and Paul Simon, my ear holes are well cared for. But right now, there's nothing I want more than late-career Paul Simon. Can you believe he was 70 when So Beautiful or So What came out? Still throwing fastballs at 70. Good on you, Paul. I'll talk to you next week. Love you, Dad.

June 1, 2025

Good morning, Papa Bear. It's your birthday month. June 1. June starts on a Sunday, on a Lord's Day, the first day of the week. I'm parked one berth over from my usual spot this morning, now directly in front of the yellowwood.

Let me tell you, Dad—we got another one. Another Beaute. Butte, Montana–level Sunday. Chef's kiss. Absolute beauty. Not a single cloud in the sky. On the drive over, I listened to a new playlist, including one Noah sent me: a late-stage Grateful Dead song called "Standing on the Moon," which is beautiful.

I woke up to 34 unread text messages from Aaron, which can only mean he was up late with some tall boys, dispensing his usual torrent of music recommendations. Who knows. Who the fuck cares? (Obviously I do, a little bit at least, if I'm mentioning it.)

We're less than a month and a half from the Tennessee reunion now. You would be geared up already. You loved the reunion, and I love it for you. I really hope Richard and Lorene can make it—I'd love to see them again.

I started journaling again this week. I've also been very disciplined with the archiving, digging into some of my writing from 2010. Woah-boy. Tumultuous year for the old G-Man, to say the least—and you'd remember parts of that. Keystone was but a month of the full roller-coaster ride. I don't re-live the past because I want to go back there—I don't—but because I love rediscovering the details that slip away from memory. Seeing a piece of primary-source history, like Ray's and my old G-chats, brings it all back. We were so loose, not trying to impress anyone. Just writing. That's the kind of writing I'm trying to get back to.

I also started a memoir by Eric Sevareid—written in the late 1940s, a guy from your dad's generation. Famous war correspondent, World War II. Grew up in Velva, North Dakota (yes, Velva—my brain tried to sabotage me there). Born around 1912, so just a few years older than your dad. Beautiful writer. Insightful. I came across him because he survived a crash flying "over the Hump" in the Himalayas during the war, hauling supplies from India to China.

One of the Haverford grads I think about a lot—Edmund Jennigs Lee II, class of '42—died in one of those crashes. He's buried at Woodlands Cemetery in University City. There's a photo of him in a Haverford yearbook, standing on the steps of Founders Hall, and every day, including today, I stand there and think about him. He had a twin sister, Genevieve, who had a son who died a few years ago. Time keeps moving, whether we like it or not. It's been a while since you've been here with us, Dad. It feels like that, anyway.

Music-wise, today is Stranger to Stranger. It used to be the end of the Paul Simon string—pun intended—until we got the transcendent Seven Psalms. Next week won't be Seven Psalms because I'll be down in Arlington watching the French Open final with my brosef Endel. Not technically a mansion, but one of my favorite places to visit. That means I'll enjoy this walk even more, knowing I'll be back in two weeks—Father's Day. Seven Psalms will be waiting then. That lines up perfectly. Let me not live in the future.

Let me live right now. I'll listen to some Paul Simon, think about you, John, Grandpop, John Henry, and all the other Poorman who've gone before me. Love you, Dad.

summer

June 22, 2025

Good morning, Dad. I just pulled into my usual spot by the observatory. It's early—barely 6 a.m.—and the birds are at it. My voice is gravely. It's the day after the 80th anniversary of your birth in Nashville, which feels like something worth sitting with for a minute.

I spent Saturday in a celebratory way. Geoff and I walked Valley Forge in the morning, and we talked about you, of course. Then I saw Mom, and later Tiff, Taylor, and I went to a barbecue at her family's house in West Philly. I finished the day with an evening stroll around Penn and stumbled upon the New Balance Nationals track meet for high schoolers. It was lively—young people everywhere, moving fast, doing what the world does, which is to exist very much in the Present.

Now here I am, reflecting on a Sunday morning. Which feels right.

I dropped off letters for Aaron and Mom to read—letters from around when you were 40. One was from Mom, written a few days before your 40th birthday in Zimbabwe. That was when Aaron and I had put together an anniversary dinner in the living room of our Belvedere house. Another was a letter you wrote to the West Hebron Church in early July 1985. The last was a handwritten letter to your dad in August of '85, right before Nonnie and Theda came to visit.

It was grounding to reconnect with you through your own words and to think about that moment—forty years ago now—exactly the midpoint between your birth and today.

I'm close to finishing uploading a collection of Grandpa's letters from Europe during the war to archive.org. I need to write a short introduction. I might add a quote or two, but I don't want to layer too much present-day commentary on top of it. I think it'll be meaningful at least for Holly, maybe for Mom, maybe for Aaron. Who knows.

Other than that, I don't know what to say. It's going to be a hot one today, which you would appreciate, though right now it's cool and calm. The Phils took an L last night but are still tied with the Mets atop the NL East, with the rubber game today. In broader news that no longer needs to concern you, Trump bombed nuclear sites in Iran, so TBD on how that all shakes out.

This morning, I was wondering what to listen to now that I wrapped up another Paul Simon album cycle last week with Seven Psalms. I considered branching out, but then it hit me: Sunday mornings at Haverford are for me, you, and Paul. And on the Founders Porch, they're also for my audio messages to Noah.

Instead of starting another album, I did something unusual for me—I made a Paul Simon playlist. You know I'm an album guy. I like hearing music the way the artist labored to assemble it. But today I made an exception. The playlist is mostly governed by our draft from Patterdale in 2016. I started with "Born at the Right Time," which felt right for your birthday, then your top five, then my top five. If there's time for one more, it'll be Graceland. Of course.

I hope you're existing in Graceland, Dad. Love you.

June 29, 2025

Good morning, Dad. It's not late, but it feels like the morning got away from me. There are more cars here than I expected at 6:48 a.m. It's already humid, the sky is sunny, and there's a lot of dew on the grass. I think I'll stick to the path this morning, at least out to the edge of the old baseball field, lest I soak my boots.

I wasn't sure what I was going to listen to today, but I think it'll be Paul Simon again—Simon & Garfunkel, to be precise. I could put something else on, but I've sort of lost the ability to fully enjoy a Sunday morning walk without Paul Simon in my ears. It feels wrong otherwise.

Sadly, he only managed to do one night of his three-night run here in Philadelphia on the new tour. He ran into some back issues and had to cancel the others. The man is 83, turning 84 in October, so you do start to wonder how much longer he can keep touring. He and Bob Dylan—they keep on keeping on.

We're getting closer to the Freeland Family reunion now. Not this coming weekend, but the one after. I need to get my act together and plan out the Monday and Tuesday in Nashville. Wednesday will be the long drive home. Don thought about coming with us in the car, but it didn't work with his schedule, so he's flying down. He'll be there, though, which will be nice—a decent showing of Poormans – Christine still representing for the fam.

Other than that, I don't really know, Dad. I don't really know. That might be the truest thing I've said in a while. Love you.

July 6, 2025

Good morning Dad, what is today? Today is … cha ching cha ching cha ching … July 6th.

What the fuck was happening on July 6th, 1925? God only knows, but your dad was 9 ½ . We can be reasonably certain if they weren't at some crazy Reformed Church conference that they were home in Narberth. So, it would have been Mary Jean, Sturgis, and Julie all at Stepney Place along with their parents, John and Mary. Maybe their grandmother was living with them, maybe not. Probably not, because I don't think that in 1925 her husband, Samuel Sturgis, had died yet. They were probably living over there on Green Lane in Manayunk.

100 years – I have been reflecting about how batshit long a time period that is to the human mind. The difference between Haverford College in 1925 versus 2025 feels like a societal light year, and yet here we are. We got here not in some fell swoop, but in a succession of moments. Like right now. A succession of Sundays in some sense.

Think about a Sunday morning in 1925. How many people even had cars on campus? Even this Observatory – I don't think it was here in 1925. These athletic fields would have been in their most primal forms. There was a cinder track back then. The trees would not have been so professionally maintained. There were far fewer college buildings. In 1925, Haverford was more than a half-century from going coed.

My mind goes forward and thinks, what will this place be like in 2125? The college will be here, but markedly different. It will have gotten that way by a succession of new moments and Sunday mornings, some of which I will be a part of, and most I won't. Some of these trees will still be living, especially the young saplings.

This is a perfect Sunday morning, not too hot. Blue sky. I'm not in a rush. I don't feel any negative energy in my body. The reunion is next weekend, so I will miss my Sunday at Haverford. I'll have a Sunday morning in Adams, TN which is special because it only happens every other year.

Don is coming. Marco's coming. Ivan's coming. It's a banner year for male Poormans at the reunion. Four out of six total. Little Johnny is in Las Vegas, and Aaron is his regular hermit self.

I think about those Freelands of old from the Carolinas who went through the Cumberland Gap and said, *this here looks to be some good farming land* and settled in Sumner County, TN and set themselves to working the land.

We're doing the drive in two stages, Dad. We're gonna drive on Wednesday afternoon from Bryn Mawr to Woodstock, VA at the at northern end of the Shenandoah Valley. Early Thursday, we are going to drive the rest of the away. I've portioned it out perfectly. I'll have an evening drive, I'll have a morning drive, and I have an afternoon drive.

For now, I'm going to jump back into the present and Paul Simon is screaming out to be heard. Last night, I was watching "The Bear" on Hulu and they had a Paul Simon needle drop. I was overjoyed. It was the unreleased that "Let Me Live in Your City". That demo song later became "Something so Right" on the album, which is a song we both you love. I was just so happy to be surprised by it:

Let me live in your city / The river's so pretty, the air is so fine / Let me room where I can lay over
I'm just a traveler eating up travelin' time / I'm just a traveler eating up my travelin' time

That's what I'm gonna be for the next week and a half, Dad – just a traveler, eating up my traveling time. Like I have been so many times. The goal is when in conversation to be really *in* it, to be listening and paying attention to the person. We'll see how I do.

Time to be present with these early Paul Simon. It's S&G's second album when Paul came back from Europe and Artie had paused architecture school. They had gotten some juice with the remix of "Sound of Silence" and decided to see if they could get some real traction with a second album.

It started that '66,67,'68 run of fame. This album would have come out in early '66. Speaking of which, bringing it back around to family, your grandmother Mary Sturgis Poorman died in early '66. She was saying goodbye to this mortal coil just as the fame of Paul Simon was saying hello. The spring baseball season of '66 was also your first on the new Haverfield field. Endings and beginnings. All right, Dad, love you.

July 20, 2025

Good morning, Dad—It's been two weeks since I last recorded one of these for you. Today is July 20th—one day before your eldest son's birthday and two days before your wife's birthday. Mom is gonna be 78, Aaron 54.

We're back from Tennessee. A successful trip—AAZ certified on both ends. I split the drive into two days: four and a half hours the first evening, a hotel overnight, and then eight and a half hours to Adams, TN on Thursday.

Kyle and Julie put us up in the back house, which was perfect. We had our own little setup. Seventy-two people came to the reunion, including the current matriarch of the family, Loreen Douglas. Tiff and I got to sit with her for a while in Sheri's kitchen as she told stories. That was meaningful.

Don came down, and of course the California crew was in effect: Claudia, Frankie, Ivan, Hannah, Marco, Marisa, Marcelina—all staying in this large, eccentric Victorian house in Springfield that we got to see briefly on Saturday night. We drove back from Springfield that night in torrential rain. I don't think I've been that focused on the road in a long time. Thank God for GPS—there were no streetlights out there, and I was basically following the curve of the road by watching my phone. But we made it back in one piece.

Last Sunday I was cheating on Haverford. Haverford doesn't mind. Nature's not sentimental. I took a walk at Austin Peay University in Clarksville, Tennessee—let's go, Pee! I walked beyond the campus onto the Riverwalk trail that runs through a beautiful forest. I was listening to Paul Simon—Simon & Garfunkel, really—and one of my favorites came on. "Flowers Never Bend with the Rainfall."

That walk took me down to the banks of the Red River near where it joins the Cumberland and continues on its long journey to the Mississippi and then out to the Gulf of Mexico. It was hot, but there was plenty of shade, and it made for a reflective Sunday morning.

Now I'm back in Philly, and this weekend feels like a return to my rituals. Yesterday I took my Saturday morning walk down at UPenn and the Woodlands Cemetery. Today I'm here Haverford, happy to see the soccer nets up on the old field—probably for a youth camp. It's overcast, but that's fine. Not raining, not too hot.

I needed this one, Dad, because next weekend I'll be back on the road. I'm heading up Friday afternoon to Chester, Vermont—one of the homes of Nancy Flint Budde. The widow Budde. Her husband, Al, died a couple of years ago of pancreatic cancer. A sad one. It was the same year Margaret Waite died of pancreatic cancer. I'll spend a couple of days with Rick then head back south. I might drive through Williams College—could be a Williams College walk in the offing on Monday morning. I guess I could do a Dartmouth walk on Sunday morning. Ooh. Tempting.

After that I'll get to see Endel for a day and stay at the Liias-Orr compound on the Hudson. It'll be a busy but fun solo traveling vacation next week. Today, however, I'm not rushing. I'm going to enjoy the day: a little Haverford walk, a little Acme stop, lots of laundry, a chat with my friend in Buffalo, a chat with Aaron.

Speaking of Aaron—he and I were trying to figure out why you and Mom gradually stopped seeing Bruce and Suse Ferguson as often in the mid-'70s, and I think I sussed it out. Mom and Suse had gradually shifted into more of a childcare-support relationship—Matthew and Kristen, me and Aaron. Once Matthew went to school, and then Kristen and Aaron around '76, that shared stage of life faded. There was just less in

common, especially when the Fergusons not being as big of church goers as you two. Hell, you were the church.

Other people came into Mom's orbit around then, especially—*dum dum dum*—Sandy Van Dyke via the Wevers. And the dinners with Bruce and Suse fell off the calendar. That's life.

I don't know which Paul Simon or Simon & Garfunkel album I'm on this week, but it's always good stuff. The Phils had a big win last night – grand slam from Schwarber, two more homers from Harper. Rubber game today against the Angels at the Bank. That's what's happening. Time to hit the grass now and change shoes. I'll talk to you next week, hopefully from somewhere in Vermont.

July 26, 2025

Hey Dad, when I talk to you in these audios I don't usually have a fully formed fantasy of how you might be listening to them. I mean, I know you're not. But there's a lot we don't understand, and I like recording them anyway.

Sometimes I picture you in a blissful, meditative state, happily interrupted now and then when one of my audios comes through. You're always interested in what I have to say, where I am—although usually that is no mystery, given I'm almost always parked in front of the observatory at Haverford.

Today, though, I'm somewhere that is soaked in significance—for you, for me, for our family. A place I very well might never have come back to in my life. I'm sitting on a picnic bench with the breeze at my back. It's about 9:30-ish in the morning and, as a hint, I'm looking out over the Green Mountains in Vermont. A bluebird just alighted onto a power line. I'm sitting at the one, the only … Merck Forest.

Man – I haven't been here since before we moved to Zimbabwe. Just sitting on this bench under the trees, in the section where we used to picnic, feels deeply nostalgic. I'm put in mind of all the home movies we have of bringing people here over the years: John, Lulu, Gwen & Bree. Buff too. Right now, I'm looking out toward the pond. I'll walk up the mountain in a bit.

I'm in Vermont because I'm staying with Rick for the weekend—he's dog-sitting for Nancy Budde. I walked around Chester this morning, that great little town with the map store you loved. Quaint, affluent, beautiful. But this is where I really wanted to come.

This is where you and Mom decided to bring Aaron and me in the late summer of '82 to tell us we were going to be moving to Southern Africa. In 1982, you were still thinking it would be South Africa. I wonder whether you and Mom agonized much about where to take us to tell us the news. The fact that you chose here meant you thought Aaron and I really liked it—and that the familiar setting would comfort us.

It didn't go well. You probably guessed it wouldn't. We staged a child revolt, went back to the car, and were insistent that we wouldn't go. It was a hinge point in our family's life. One reality—something I'd always assumed without thinking about it as a kid, just in blissful inertia—suddenly became another. My childhood was going to be bifurcated not just by a state or two, but by the span of continents.

You felt it was a call from God. That's how you framed it, how you explained it to others. You said that in the fall of 1981, while on study leave at Gordon-Conwell, you felt the Holy Spirit telling you to explore and help out in South Africa. That began a process that took much longer than you initially expected.

If I'm being honest, I think it was more that you wanted a new challenge. And because of your belief system, you experienced that restlessness as a call from God. You were tempted by the glint of distant shores. You felt there wasn't much more room for your growth in Hebron. You'd already been there longer than you ever expected, and it was time.

I think after the ten-year mark in West Hebron, in 1980, you were looking for what your next step would be. Then it presented itself in a confluence of events, which happened to include hosting a rotary exchange student from South Africa a year before you received the "call" from the Holy Spirit. Isn't that convenient, as the Church Lady would say.

You made that decision knowing Aaron and I wouldn't be happy. Framing it as God's call does give a kind of societal protection to a decision that otherwise might have been seen as completely batshit crazy. Even with that protection, plenty of people questioned the safety of taking us to Southern Africa. But that's what you wanted to do. And we did it.

Here's the good news, at least from my perspective: regardless of what intellectual rationalizations were involved, I'm glad we moved to Harare. My life has been what it's been, and I'll take all of it—the joys and the dissatisfactions—that came with those life choices. Zimbabwe opened my young mind up to so much. Looking back, I wouldn't have wanted it any other way.

The fact that it all started here, on this beautiful plot of land on the edge of the Green Mountains, is kind of perfect. The last time I was here was 1983. That makes it… forty-two years ago. That feels significant, and I wanted you to know I was thinking about you.

I'm going to enjoy this walk listening to some Peter, Paul and Mary. Let's fucking go.

August 3, 2025

Hey, Dad. I'm back once again at our sacred spot. Last Saturday morning I talked to you from Merck Forest. Today, I'm back in front of the yellowwood tree adjacent to the observatory, on the grounds of a freshly-mowed Haverford College. The goalposts and nets are up on the soccer field. The time is 6:25am, and I'm about to take my walk listening to Bridge Over Troubled Water—the crowning achievement of Simon & Garfunkel as a group, and the slingshot that launched Paul into his solo career.

I just finished a four-hour documentary on Billy Joel's career. Billy, Billy, Billy boy. He's almost ten years younger than Paul—not quite, probably—but yeah, he also had plenty of marriage problems. He was married and divorced three times. Paul married and divorced twice before staying with Edie. Time will tell if Billy's latest marriage is long-term. I mean, he could die at any time—any of us could—but he's only been married to his fourth wife Alexis since 2015.

But Billy was (is?) a boozer, and Paul avoided that. They say that's one of the reasons why Updike and Roth were both so prolific as writers. They avoided the trap most authors fall into: they didn't become reliant on alcohol. It seems like Paul fits that mold as well. Even though he's lost hearing in one ear, he's still touring.

Anyway—what have I done since I talked to you at Merck? That same evening, I went to Plymouth Notch, Vermont, and visited the birthplace and graveyard of none other than Calvin Coolidge—President from 1923 to early 1929. "Keep Cool" with Coolidge. Silent Cal. Plymouth Notch is a quiet hamlet in the Green Mountains, so the nickname is appropriate. To grow up there in the late 1800s, I can only imagine …

On Sunday it was rainy, but by evening it cleared up and I went to Dartmouth. I had a glorious walk. Hanover is a walker's paradise. They've let the old golf course go to seed—COVID was one of the reasons they stopped maintaining it—and as it grew and grew and grew, the town decided to take it over and turn it into walking paths. So right there where Reservoir Road dead-ends, you can walk straight into this serpentine sprawl of paths and meadows that lead down to the pine trees along the Connecticut River.

It was a pristine late afternoon and evening of walking—although I was listening to the end of a very sad true-crime podcast about two Dartmouth professors who were murdered in 2001, randomly, by two high-school schmucks.

Then I walked around the campus, taking a predictable route: past the old gym, the football field, the indoor field house. Then down the little commercial strip. I'm glad I visited. It was worth the fifty-minute drive each way.

On Monday, I drove to visit Endel in Saugerties. I stopped through Williamstown, MA to walk the campus of Williams College—arch-enemy of Amherst—and saw a small obelisk commemorating a meeting of four lads in a field there in 1806 which is considered the spiritual beginning of the American Board of Foreign Missions. That was the beginning of the American Protestant evangelization push into the wider world—which, as we know, swallowed up both your grandfather, Reverend John H. Poorman, and yourself—but did not get me or Aaron started on the all that … *You want to be a missionary? You got that missionary zeal? Let a stranger change your life. How's that make you feel?*

Endel's sister's place is redonk. They're building and acquiring homes at a pace I can hardly keep up with. Really innovative stuff. I stayed in the barn and left my iPad there—kind of like when you left your laptop at Sheri's in 2017. I had a good time. Played pickleball and felt old for the next two days because I was sore.

I feel old in general, Dad. The fifties are no joke, man. Between my GI system acting up, between the soreness if I play any sport I haven't played in a while, between my eyesight, between my increasing claustrophobic instincts—I'm like, *F this, man*.

Give me 42 again … when we were in Richmond, after the week in Kendal, getting ready for the last stretch of walks—two days on the vale and then into the North Yorkshire Moors. Give me that, man. I was feeling good, if memory serves. I wasn't wearing glasses, that's for sure.

Enough whining. I haven't even gotten around to telling you about Mom's neurology appointment. I'll save that for another time. Time to listen to music instead.

August 10, 2025

Good morning, Father o' mine. I am sitting here on a gorgeous morning, just past 6:30, the only car in the row. I'm ready to listen to Paul Simon's first album and say good morning to you—spirit version at least.

I'm in a pretty good mood today. Who knows why we're in good moods on certain days and not others? And "good" is, you know, whatever—a pretty reductive term, right?

I forget if it was last week—yeah, it was last week—I didn't record Noah an audio. I didn't feel as centered as I usually do here. But yesterday we had a nice family day out in King of Prussia. We got Taylor some new school kicks. We also went to see this movie called Weapons. Had a good time, came back home. I watched an episode of this Polish espionage drama, then I knocked out. No phone hijinks. I slept eight and a half hours. I'm up, I've got my Jav, and I was reading a little Updike.

You know, Dad, I love Updike. I don't read a lot of his books cover to cover, but I do love his essays in The New Yorker. Being about ten years older than you were, Updike helps me understand you better than almost any other author. He has a discerning eye for the era you lived in—how your particular white male Protestantism situated itself in American society in the 60s, 70s and 80s. I find it so insightful, so descriptive.

I was reading A Month of Sundays—great title, by the way. "A month of Sundays" gives the impression of a long time. Taken literally, it means thirty weeks—seven months. I guess you technically could say thirty-one, but let's call it thirty, which is a little over half a year. Ooh—hello, kind sir. Male cardinal to my left.

It is three days away from Tiff's and my wedding anniversary—our third. Five days away from Endel and Kate's tenth wedding anniversary, which puts me in mind of 2015, exactly a decade ago. You had just retired, quote-unquote, from your full-time executive director role at Welcoming the Stranger. I had just started that summer taking Dr. Spencer out for lunches and I was gearing up to go on my month-long, cross-country trip in the blue Prius.

In our 2016 across-England walk mythology, today is the day we stayed in the Esk River Valley just below the North Yorkshire Moors, with that talkative woman with the beautiful gardens. She gave us a tour as evening waned and twilight descended on the entire peaceful scene. That Sunday morning, we woke up and had a quiet river walk. You went to church in Lealholm. I remember the bed and breakfast we stayed in that night, and where we had dinner—where they squeezed us in—and we watched some of the Olympic rugby, you know, whatever it was: four-on-four, five-on-five, the short squads. I remember where we had lunch, too—I can picture it. I had a baked potato with tuna in it, maybe cheese on top. Ordered it from the guy behind the bar. Anyway, enough nostalgia.

It was a full moon last night. Sounds like the beginning of a Paul Simon song. The moon's about to set now, and it's going to be a sunny day. No clouds in sight. I'm going to let Paul take me on my revolution—talking about a revolution. Yeah. I think I'll walk with Holly today, hear about her summer travels. Her oldest, Peter, is going to be a junior at Lower Merion. Where does time go? But as always, I just wanted to check in and say hello. To say that you are missed, and that you are always shimmering above and beneath and around this walk at Haverford. Godspeed.

August 17, 2025

Good morning, Dad. It's that time of year when the fall sports teams arrive early to get some practice in. Let's go Fords! Fords Forever, right?

We were here twice yesterday. In the morning, I walked the nature trail, and in the afternoon, we had our first family picture session—me, Tiff, and Taylor—in six years! Taylor had fallen out of love with getting her picture taken, so our annual Haverford photo day hadn't happened for a long time. Tiff finally bribed her yesterday so we could do it. They were in these beautiful navy blue dresses, and we walked around to some of our favorite photo spots on campus and took a bunch of pictures. I still have to go through them to see which ones we like. On a late weekend evening in the summer, it was quiet as a church mouse.

I'm here at my normal time, getting ready for my little Paul Simon worship service. Last week was Paul Simon first self-titled album. This week is There Goes Rhymin' Simon, his 1973 album. I can't remember if it was released before or after I was born on September 14th—I'll guess before—it just averages out, right? But that's what's on deck.

I'm heading to Ocean City with Tiff, Taylor, and Lily this afternoon. It's been a busy weekend. At almost 52, I prefer not to be so busy, but what are ya gonna do? We like our family days at the shore, so I've got to get it done and try to enjoy it in the moment.

Mom and Melissa push off today for Simsbury. Mom is going to be there for three weeks. I don't know if I've mentioned it in one of these audio letters before, but Mom has been diagnosed with mild to moderate cognitive decline, which is likely going to progress to major cognitive decline (what people used to call some form of dementia). It's sad, but also not unpredictable, as that is life, and it might happen to any of us—it might even happen to me. It might have happened to you had you lived longer.

We're going to take it month by month and see how it goes. For this month, she's going to spend most of the time up with Nance, and that starts today.

She and Melissa got a ton done this week at the apartment. The Radwyn put in new carpet. Mom and Melissa bought some furniture and reorganized a few rooms. They did it all while Aaron is away—he flies back Wednesday, I think.

Oh, I finished putting together a PDF book of Grandpop's letters back home to his mother from World War II in Europe. That was a nice accomplishment. I was listening to an audiobook this week where Adam Gopnik made a distinction between "accomplishment" and "achievement," and it was very helpful in my mind as it relates to meaning-making in my own life. Part of that for me is the accomplishment of sticking to, enjoying, and being present for these Simon Sundays with Sturge. It's always a joy. No rain today, so let's see what life is gonna bring me. Love you, Dad.

August 24, 2025

Good morning, Dad. Sunday morning light is breaking over the horizon to my left. I'm sitting here in the car with my iced coffee, about to listen to Still Crazy After All These Years.

I'm still recovering from a 24-hour flu that hit me Friday into Saturday, though I'm mostly better. I still made it out to Phoenixville on Friday because I had an appointment with my buddy from high school, Chris Mull. We had our old class photo from the gym—194 people—and 34 years later we decided to go through and see how many names each of us could remember.

I got first names for 89 of them, about 45%. Chris did way better—around 90%. Pretty amazing. Some of those faces, I just stared at them thinking, "No effing clue."

Driving back from Phoenixville, I could feel something was off, and sure enough: rough sleep, chills, headache, no energy. Yesterday I rested. Today I want to get back into my routine before the work week starts. I'm here at Haverford. I'm up. I'm going to take my walk.

Last night and this morning I've been listening to an AskHistorians podcast about Zimbabwe—this guy doing his doctoral research at Cambridge walking the interviewer through a big swath of Zimbabwean history. Really fascinating. A lot of it I already knew, but it's always good to hear it again: the tensions, the inflection points.

I've been thinking about you and Mom taking us to Merck Forest back in August '82, just a month after Big Daddy died. At that point, you really thought the fork in the road was South Africa or bust. I don't think Zimbabwe was even on your radar as an option. Funny how life zigs, then zags.

As Zadie Smith writes, the world is everything that is the case, and it was the case that you were feeling restless. You wanted a new challenge. You'd been in Hebron longer than most pastors stay at their first church out of seminary. You had the mission-field gene in you, like your grandfather—even though he never made it to a foreign assignment. Or maybe your grandmother said, "Absolutely not."

I was also remembering how your grandmother died in the spring of 1966—when you were a junior here at Haverford. That was the same year the Bush War officially started in Rhodesia. Life is full of strange overlaps.

Speaking of wild: one guy in my and Chris' class photo—Keith Smith. I never knew him, probably never said a word to him. Turns out he murdered his girlfriend in 2016, tried and failed to kill himself, and is now serving life. Like Brandi Simmons. Dark stuff.

Mom, meanwhile, is finishing up her first week in Simsbury. Two more to go. That's about all I've got today. I think I'll let music and silence carry me the rest of the way. Until next time, Dad.

August 31, 2025

How's it going, Dad? It's 6:41 a.m. on the final day of August. Labor Day weekend. The unofficial end of summer. I'm not sorry to see it go. You know me: I'm a fall guy, a spring guy. Right now we've got fall weather in full effect — 53 degrees at dawn, sunny skies, just me, the grass, the trees, the birds & the bees.

I wonder if Haverford soccer is in season yet. The fall of 1965 wasn't too shabby for you guys, from what I recall — though, to be honest, I can't quite remember the details. Sixty years on. Sixty years! When you say the number by itself, it doesn't sound like much, but when I picture you running around these fields as a twenty-year-old? Holy hell. It hits a little differently.

Taylor finished her first week of school. Seems to be going okay. I don't have much to do with her schooling anymore — she's almost thirteen, that famously tough age. Other than taking her to the movies sometimes, I'm not always sure where our connection points are. Like so many kids with phone access (during the weekends at least), that's pretty much all she wants to do.

Then, of course, I look at me and Tiff and think: *we're always staring at screens, too.* Even when I'm out walking, I'm listening to something. I'm rarely in silence. Silencia.

Mom is finishing out her stay at Simsbury. Melissa and Daniel Vazquez will bring her home next Saturday. Then she'll be back in her usual routine of texting me in the mornings with her cares and worries — and that's just how it is. Aaron is… Aaron.

The Phils got swept by the hated Mets earlier this week, but now they've taken three straight at home against the almost-as-hated Braves. Schwarber had a four-home-run night on Thursday, becoming only the 21st player ever to do that — and didn't even need extra innings. You might remember Mike Schmidt did the same thing in extra innings against the Cubs in '76, the bicentennial year.

So here's the plan: I'm going to try to journal every single day in September. Working title — just for me, nobody else: The September I Turned 52. Something I'd want to read ten years from now, if I'm lucky enough to still be around at 62.

And here's the big news: I've got a prescription for Lexapro. I'm about to start a low dose of an SSRI. Lately I've felt that foundational anxiety — the stuff I'm so good at repressing — gathering momentum. There were moments when I worried it might break out of whatever vaults I'd stuffed it behind and trigger a full-blown panic attack. I do not want that experience. I have a sense from your stories what those are like.

So, before my brain goes there, I'm trying to get ahead of it. Side effects may or may not show up, and they may or may not go away — we'll see. But the risk seems worth it, since friends have spoken well of it.

I doubt Paul Simon has ever touched an SSRI; I suspect he'd worry it would mess with his creativity. He's coming up on his 84th birthday in October. Whether or not he's still going strong is debatable, he's still going. And I'm still listening. So let's do this, Brutus. Talk to you next week, inshallah.

September 7, 2025

Good morning, Dad. I'm in a different spot this morning—over by St. Paul's Cemetery where most of your ashes are buried (a few are scattered at Haverford and in West Hebron). Same place as your dad and mom, and as John and Bobby. It's just about dawn on Sunday, September 7th, a week before I turn 52.

Let's rewind a bit. You turned 52 in June 1997. That was your first birthday with both Aaron and I living in Los Angeles. You and Mom were about to visit. A year later, you'd become a grandfather for the first time. But none of us knew that at the time—Aaron hadn't even had his first date with Claudia yet.

I talked to you last week about finally going all-in on an SSRI. So far, so okay. This morning was a little strange, though. I started taking it on Monday, so today's the seventh day. I had a brief stomach issue the very first day, but this morning felt different.

I woke with one of those headaches I sometimes get from not enough sleep… except it wasn't quite that. My whole mouth felt off, and the headache was bad—unusually bad for me. I took some ibuprofen, but then I started to get that sinking feeling: Uh oh. Is this something serious? Am I going to end up at the ER?

Then my body started overheating. I got up, turned on the air conditioner, sat right in front of it—still felt like I was burning up. I went into the bathroom thinking, *okay, this might be it.* Once, since I've been with Tiff, I had something similar: I threw up and almost collapsed and afterward felt immediately better. Like my body had reset.

This time, I sat on the toilet sweating bullets, turned the shower on cold, knowing I could jump in at any time. Sitting there breathing slowly started to calm me down. Little by little I realized I'm wasn't going to collapse. I'm not going to have to wake Tiff up and tell her we need to go to the hospital. My body came around. I took a cool shower, my temp returned to normal, and I went about my usual routine—drove past Lankenau to the Wynnewood Starbucks, got a chocolate croissant and a coffee.

It is ugly out today. You can hear the rain in the background. It poured most of the night. Haverford is going to be sog-to-the-E. But, of course, I'm still walking—I have Hearts and Bones on tap.

The headache is mostly gone. I don't know if that's the ibuprofen or just luck. I also don't know if this morning had anything to do with my body acclimating to the SSRI. Unsurprisingly, this week I've been able to get excited but haven't been able to come—but I told myself I'd give it at least a month, hopefully three., I've already felt some rewards: little pockets of calm where things don't seem quite as significant or dire. I like that feeling. I'm just trying to focus on my breathing when those tiny moments of panic or uncertainty show up.

Shifting gears, the rain sounds take me right back to that little town—Danby Wiske. Dan-b-fucking-whisk. Somewhere between the Yorkshire Dales and the North Yorkshire Moors. That night when I snuck into the empty room that was unoccupied.

Mom is back from a long trip to Connecticut. She noticed the emotional undercurrents of the Jacobs household this time—they're always there, but I think it was a little too long for her. Danny and Melissa came down and helped set things up in the apartment, and the soft and chairs will be coming soon. Hopefully she'll be happy as a clam here at the Radwyn. We'll see how she does this week—how often she's texting, how confused her calendar gets. She's on the road to dementia, Dad. It's not ideal, but life isn't

ideal. Her sense of time… well, she has some, but not much. Her calendar is endlessly confusing to her. So we'll take things one challenge at a time.

The rain's lightened now. Your gravestone is on my right, a weeping willow to my left. When we buried your ashes here, some crows landed on the top branches, and it reminded me of that Paul Simon lyric I quote all the time:

> *If I come back as a tree or a crow*
> *or even the wind-blown dust,*
> *find me on the ancient road*
> *in the songs when the wires are hushed.*
> *Hurry on and remember me*
> *as I'll remember you.*
> *Far above the golden clouds*
> *the earth vibrates, the sky is blue,*
> *and everything about it is a love song.*

Well said, Paul, well said.

The Phils are playing good baseball. The Eagles won their first game. The earth vibrates. The sky is not blue. Love you, Dad.

September 15, 2025

Hello Dad, we meet at an uncommon time. It's past midnight. It's like 12:45am on September 15th so my birthday has passed, but only barely.

You might be wondering why I didn't record my 'Year of Sundays' audio this morning when I was at Haverford College. Was I at Haverford? Yes, I was. It was a beautiful morning at Haverford, but mom was in a slight panic because she had told Julie that she could pick her up to go to church (Julie has a broken bone in her foot) and mom was confused about the timing. Mom called me right when I pulled in to Haverford and said Julie had asked her to call at 6:30 in the morning and … it was a whole thing. Mom had obviously gotten it mixed up—Julie has never asked anyone to call her at 6:30am.

That threw me out of my routine and I didn't get a chance to record on my 52nd birthday, but I did my walk and then went to the Radwyn. I was helping mom look for her Bible when, unbeknownst to me at the time, I wrenched my lower back. I was moving one of the big Tupperware storage bins while on my knees and I guessed I aggravated something. Tonight, the pain came on in earnest. But here I am. What are you gonna do, baby?

I'm laying here and I'm laughing at the comedy of it all. I don't have to go to work tomorrow. I had requested off to "celebrate" my birthday, but not sure how much moving around I'll feel like doing. Yeah, it's kind of darkly humorous.

Laying here in the middle of the night, it made me think about you. This is my second week on Lexapro, and my body and mind are still getting used to it. I guess body and mind are one and the same – why do we separate them in the West? But I'm glad I am taking it because it is helping hold back my mind from snowballing down anxiety mountain. It's easier to bring myself present, just breathe and to remember that it is all vaguely humorous, this condition of human life and the situations we get ourselves into. This too shall pass. One day is not a week, a week is not a month. A month is not a year. I'm pretty comfortable laying here. Even if tomorrow I can't walk as much as I usually do … that will be okay too. Anyway, love you, Dad.

Fall

September 28, 2025

Good morning, Papa-rino. That's a new one—I don't think I've called you that before.

The Haverford bell tower is about to ring 7 a.m. It rained overnight, so there's a light patina of moisture on the grass, but the sun is about to rise, a new day is dawning, and I'm here—especially grateful to be walking this week. The rarest of all birds last week—a week when I was home but didn't get out here for my Sunday walk. Almost unheard of.

I was on the IR. My back was messed up. I haven't recorded a Sunday letter since—I don't think I've done one since my birthday, the day I strained my lower back. I'm still recovering a bit, though nothing that keeps me from my appointed rounds. Just a little tightness, but no pain. Last week I rested up, which is insane because I really wanted to feel like myself for Rhythm of the Saints week—just a glorious album, and still the one that, at 52, feels closest to my own time of life.

What else is new, Dad? Well—I'm still taking the SSRI. Today marks my fourth completed week on the generic form of Lexapro, and I think—knock on wood—I've navigated the mildly annoying side effects. I don't want to say I'm in the clear, but I'm feeling pretty good.

Now that I'm taking something for anxiety, I understand why mood medication is so hard to navigate. Once you're on it and feeling better, your mind tries to trick you into believing you'd feel this way even if you taper off. But no—I'm feeling this way *because* I'm on it. It's so easy to forget how I felt before. Luckily, I was journaling this month, which helps.

We've got three more days of September, and then it'll be October 1st. Tonight Mom, Holly, and I are going to an event at the Cricket Club—maybe the full Don and Sherina crew too—honoring Julie and some other women who've worked on the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts Women's Committee.

Phillies: last day of the season. They won the NL East, secured the two-seed in the National League, and get to rest for the first series. Then they'll play either the Dodgers—most likely—or whatever team the Dodgers face first, which comes down to Mets or Reds on the final day.

Mom is taking things week by week. Last night she was in pretty good spirits. The new furniture is here. The sofa is nice. The chairs look good—aren't super comfortable, but who cares? I didn't care to change them in the first place, although it is nice to have a new sofa. The old one wasn't great for Mom's back. But she seems pleased.

I've got a full week of work coming up. Yom Kippur is Wednesday night. Got a wedding in two weeks. Life goes on.

I just listened to a song by Phil Ochs, someone I knew nothing about—maybe vaguely recognized the name. The song is called When I'm Gone—a touching reflection on life, the present, and living while we still can. Then I looked him up and realized: holy shit, he died when he was 36. Turns out he hung himself at his brother's house. The brother's name was Sonny, which is a coincidence because the "Obvious Child"—the first song I'll hear this morning—features a Sonny. Phil Ochs struggled with mental illness and drinking and took his life in the mid-1970s. He's been gone a long time, even before the Bicentennial. And now we're coming up on the 250th.

Phil Ochs is gone. You're gone. Nonnie's gone. Grandpop's gone. John's gone. Bobby's gone. John Joya is gone. Monica's gone. Gift is gone. Charles is gone. So many people are gone—and so, too, will I and everyone else I'm going to talk to today … eventually. But right now, those of us who are here … are here. Time to listen to Paul. Love you, Dad.

October 5, 2025

Good morning, Daddio. It's just after dawn. The forecast calls for clear skies and a high of 80. I'm looking out at your old soccer field and it's freshly mowed. It looks quite nice.

I checked the Haverford soccer website and the team is on quite a streak of games without a loss. A lot of ties this year, a few wins. Seems like they must have a good back line. They play Swarthmore at home this year. I should go. I should invite El Professor. But that's not until November.

Last night our Fightins didn't fight quite well enough—at least not at the plate. Sánchez pitched a pretty good game, but the bats let him down. They lost Game 1 of the NLDS to the Dodgers at the Bank, 5–3. No joy in Mudville..

There was joy in Adams, TN because the Brewers—Kyle's Crew – beat the Cubs pretty convincingly in Game 1 of their best-of-five. The baseball playoffs are a fun time of year.

What else is going on? While I was waiting for the sunrise this morning at the Wynnewood Starbucks, I was reading a chapter by a writer named Clyde Edgerton in a book about modern writers wrestling with their relationship to the Bible. He grew up Southern Baptist, but his story felt a bit like mine in the way he drifted away. He even used the phrase "slip-sliding" in his essay, and of course all I could hear in my head was:

Slip slidin' away… slip slidin' away..

He didn't mention Paul, but given that Edgerton was born in the '50s—had to be the early '50s, since he served in Southeast Asia as a fighter pilot—he would have been right in the thick of the Paul Simon era.

Following in your footsteps, I've gone back to an American classic. I'm listening to The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, and loving it. No, it's not Faulkner, who I know you adored. It's the other giant: Samuel Clemens, Mr. Mark Twain. Listening to it has been transformative. It's even made me wonder if I ever read Huckleberry Finn from start to finish. If I did, it would've been in school at Phoenixville, and honestly… I'm not sure I did. I know I read Tom Sawyer in Zimbabwe just for pleasure, but Huck Finn? I'm doubtful.

It's fun going into a full work week with an audiobook I'm itching to listen to—and with Phillies playoff baseball on tap. God forbid they get swept; that would be such a bummer. But at least there's Monday and Wednesday—Monday here, Wednesday in LA—and possibly Thursday and next Saturday too. Big week ahead. And I have a wedding next Sunday.

I haven't talked to Mom much the past few days. She hasn't been texting, which either means she's doing okay or she's… in her feelings. We'll see. I'm going to see her after my morning walk.

And this morning walk comes with "the dry '90s," as I call Paul Simon's output from that era. Not dry creatively—he was always creative—but dry in the sense that he was wrestling with his own angel, which was The Capeman. Even if it wasn't a successful Broadway show, it was, as we both know, a successful album. So I'm going to listen to that this morning as I perambulate this sacred campus—my church of choice. Not one that promises eternity, but one that promises right now. I'm going to take it up on that promise.

I'll say hello to the crows, to the trees, to the windblown dust, and I'll remember you—*"on the ancient road in the song when the wires are hushed."*

October 12, 2025

Good morning, Daddio. This is "Year of Sundays Four, number 52." The fifty-second entry. So I'm going to have to move on to Year of Sunday Five next week. Here we are on October 12th, close to my journaling New Year. October 20th—coming up a week from Monday—is when I wrote my first Moleskine journal entry in 2015. A decade. A decade hence. I've documented my entire 40s.

It's a little before 7:30 on an overcast morning, but at least it's not raining yet, though it probably will later. We're heading to the Last of the Mohicans wedding—Jeff Pearson, 53 years young, my buddy from Lehigh—getting married today for the first time up in Sterling, NJ. Don't think I've ever been there. The wedding's at 4pm. I'll stop in to see Mom briefly beforehand. She wasn't doing great yesterday, but hopefully she can motivate herself to go to church this week, since she skipped last week. The less said about that, the better. You get the hand you're dealt—she got a tough one brain-wise—and we do the best we can with what we're given.

The Phils have laid down their caps for the year. A very disappointing Game 4 on Thursday night in Los Angeles, where they had a lead going into the seventh, and then their manager, in my opinion, screwed the pooch. He intentionally walked the bases loaded and our pitcher walked in the tying run. After that, a terrible error by one of our relievers in the bottom of the 11th let the winning run score, and they flew home. Last night the Brewers pushed on, so the NLCS is Kyle's Brew Crew against El Dodgerino's. Home field to the Brew Crew. I'm excited for Kyle. The Brewers were in the World Series in 1982—the year we went to Wisconsin on summer break. I relived some of that on YouTube this week. So funny to watch old baseball.

I watched some of Game 7, started by Glen Falls native Dave LaPointe for the Cardinals. The Cardinals won, but LaPointe didn't get the W. I'm hoping for Kyle that this time the Brewers take can win it all.

I think I'm going to the Swarthmore game this year—it's here at Haverford. It's the 60th anniversary of your junior-year matchup in 1965. I'll invite Don and make it an event in your honor. I'm hoping to head up to Lehigh on a Friday, if the weather cooperates, for my annual visit. The Engineers are undefeated in football. I even met an Engineer alum, class of '70 (a large Jefferson donor) this week.

Paul Simon's birthday is this month. Might even be this week. I forget the exact date. He turns 84. In his honor, today on the liturgical calendar it's 2000—he was on the cusp of 60 and released You're the One, a

wonderful album. I think of it as the start of his later period. There's Rhythm of the Saints and everything before it, and then there's You're the One and everything after. As the leaves start to turn, the temperatures cool, and the days grow shorter, I'm turning to his later years too. Amen. Love you, Dad.

October 19, 2025

Welcome to Year of Sundays Cinco, episode one. We've turned the page. What is today? The 19th—a day before the anniversary of my journal day. I hadn't thought about this, Dad. Ten years ago today was the last day I didn't moleskin-journal for another eight years.

I am here in my favorite spot in front of the yellow wood tree, whose leaves are actually yellow right now. It is sunrise—literally. 7:16am, fair skies, moderate temps, fall weather. Life is good, Dad.

What's the news as I start this fifth cycle of recording these Year of Sundays? Another human has entered the world whom I'm connected to. Endel and Kate had their second son—their "Garth," so to speak—just 21 and a half months after Desh. They've named him Rhodes. He's a big boy, a 10-pounder. I was born 27 months after Aaron and there is one more similarity: super Christian parents. I'm happy for them and can't wait to meet him.

On the baseball side of things, the Dodgers beat Kyle's Brewers in the NLCS. Swept them. In the deciding game, Shohei Ohtani both started the game as a pitcher, threw six scoreless innings with ten strikeouts, and, as a leadoff hitter, hit three home runs and walked once. Mind-boggling. Don Larsen–esque, with his World Series perfect game.

Today marks seven weeks of the SSRI, and I think I'm up on the surfboard. I was able to bust that nutter-butter last night, so that side of things doesn't seem as off as it was. I'm not going to sweat it.

My mind hasn't gone off the rails. It hasn't snowballed. It hasn't felt out of control. Things with Mom have felt less overwhelming. I think the shorter days and the weather might be a struggle for her, but she's got some things coming up will make her happy.

We're going to see Del & Keli soon. I am worried about David, though. Mom doesn't know that the tumor in his GI system is cancerous. They're trying to shrink it before surgery, but there's peril in all of that. We're all one diagnosis away from being like, "fuck," and having to deal with a different reality. As I get older, I'm more aware of that—especially as my friend Dave has been diagnosed with ALS.

Speaking of friends—I saw Ketan, Jeffy, Ray at Pierson's wedding last weekend. A Sunday-night wedding. Tiff and I had fun. Nice little event. I think about how many weddings you attended and officiated. It would be a startling number if I added them all up.

Pretty normal week otherwise. I got to the gym a couple of times. Gotta keep that going. Even though I have Wednesday off, I think I'm going to celebrate 10 years since starting these journals by going to Longwood Gardens.

In two weeks, it'll be the annual Swarthmore-Haverford soccer game. You only had one home game against Swarthmore during your college career—and it was your junior year, 1965. This year is the 60th anniversary of that game. You lost 2–0. I still don't understand why in 1964, when it should've been at home, it was played at Swarthmore again. And then again your senior year. Could've been a million reasons. Probably the field. Who knows?

Turning to Sir Paul, his birthday was this past Monday. We've got the Brian Eno album on tap. The first song has the lyric about wearing my father's coat. I'm not wearing yours today, Dad. I wish I had that Lumberjack one that was in heavy rotation up in Hebron—the one you'd rake some leaves with.

Speaking of Hebron, I talked to Heidi yesterday. She and Andrea are coming up in December to see Mama Pajama. All's well up there. The tide of time comes in and goes out. The mountains stand, the creeks flow, sermons are preached, covered-dish dinners are organized. We breathe, we listen to music, and we spend time with others. When things work, we feel gratitude—as I do right now. Love you, Dad.

October 26, 2025

Hello, Daddy-O. Some clown in a blue car took my spot, but I'm here, staring at the observatory, the yellow wood, and the soccer field. It's a clear one with a beautiful wisp of clouds. Temperature outside, according to the car: 41 degrees.

We're a couple minutes before sunrise on… what's today? The 25th, maybe? Things are good. I haven't taken my first sip of Jav, so let me do that on record…<slurp>… Oh, that's good. That is good. Little spill action—just a touch. Gotta be careful. Sometimes they don't put these lids on muy bueno.

So, what's the good news, Dad? Had a day off on Wednesday—took my annual Lehigh trip. Glorious Things of Thee are Spoken. Walking Goodman campus to start the day is sublime. I've done it raw, without anything in my ears, but this time I did it with Dvorak. Yesterday, I volunteered at the medical school reunion weekend and I was talking to a co-worker who went to Ursinus and ran cross-country. I asked if she'd ever run the Lehigh course, and she gushed about how beautiful it is. I was like, "Hell yeah—I just walked it this week, man."

Then I did a little time on campus, did one of my secret sermons in a book that Peter Likins had written—he was president when I was there. He had an interracial family; I never knew that while I was going there. So much we don't know.

Then I got to see the renovated University Center. For the first time, I popped over to Bethlehem proper and walked around, saw Moravian Academy where I taught Summer Bridge in 1995, walked a cemetery, and soaked in the vibes. That was Wednesday. The rest of the week was de rigueur. I don't remember any highlights or lowlights.

My meds are still working. I've felt even-keeled—no anxiety, no panic attacks. I think they're having a bit of a side effect in helping moderate my too long residencies in… "stoke town." How do I describe it? I've thought about this with Aaron, with the meds they have now that don't stop you from drinking but just give you a little less of a thrill.

That's it -- the thought of having a long session now has less of a thrill for me. I'm more likely to think, "Whatevs, I'll watch TV or listen to a podcast." If nothing else, it benefits my sleep patterns—which will benefit even more next Sunday when we return to Standard Time. I need that sunrise to go back an hour. I like waking up with early dawn around 5:30.

World Series update—of which the Phillies are not a part. Blue Jays took the first, Dodgers took the second. Rod's Georgia Tech Yellow Jackets are still undefeated and ranked seventh in college football, so he must be psyched. NBA season started. Sixers are 2–0, but they'll be a mediocre team. I'm pegging them at 41–41. Actually, after watching two games, let me upgrade that to 42–40. That's my official prediction.

I listened to some past "Year of Sundays" recordings as I walked this week. It's fun to venture back and realize, "Oh yeah, that's what was happening, that's what was on my mind." All my journaling and reflectiveness and audio notes—to you or myself—they all distill down to a couple themes. The main theme is trying to live in gratitude of the Present Moment. Trying my best—despite a mind not set to this default—to give praise to the world and the people in it. To notice. To hold things dear, because everything is impermanent.

A rattle-a-tat. I learned Anne Lamott—the writer—had a grandfather like yours who was involved in Japan. More than involved—he was a missionary there. Yours just corresponded and handled logistics for missionaries in Japan. But her grandfather was one, and I guess her father was born in Japan. I need to read more about it.

Let's bring it back. It's now … three minutes after sunrise. I have So Beautiful or So What, the 2011 album, on tap. Paul turned 70 that year and he was still churning out bangers, man. Absolute bangers.

Mom and I have the WTS International Dinner coming up, and then Thanksgiving. And Heidi and Andrea in December, and then Michele and the crew. We'll muddle on, Dad. We'll take it a day at a time, and we'll punctuate it with music and laughter. Love you.

November 2, 2025

Good morning, Daddy-O. Unlike last week, I've got my preferred parking spot. It is mine for the asking. It's a beautiful morning—only 37°, but clear, with plenty of leaves on the ground for autumnal crunch.

What's even better is that I'm looking out at quiet Walton Field to my left where yesterday—in honor of the only Swarthmore game you played at home in 1965—Don and I watched the undefeated Haverford Fords. They came into the game against Swarthmore with nine wins, zero losses, and eight ties—one of the best defenses in the league, maybe in all of Division III.

They controlled the game but faiedl to score through 87 minutes until a ball fell to one of their seniors on the left. He found some space and drilled it into the right-hand corner. Pandemonium for the Haverford faithful. Haverford 1, Swarthmore 0. The Centennial Conference was theirs for the taking. It was a beautiful day for soccer—great to catch up with Don and enjoy some good old-fashioned local live sports.

Contrast that with last night's Game Seven of the World Series—Dodgers vs. Blue Jays in Toronto. I only made it through the fourth inning before I fell asleep. But I woke up—actually half-woke up—because the radio volume must have gotten louder in the ninth inning. The Dodgers, down by one, tied it with a solo home run to send it into extras. And then, in the top of the 11th, Will Smith hit another solo homer, and they barely held on to win it.

A real gut punch for Toronto fans who haven't won since—you remember—1993, the only World Series game either of us ever went to or probably ever will. We saw Game Five at the Vet. Game Six was when Joe Carter walked it off back in Toronto. I was trying to explain to Tiff that I can't root for the Blue Jays in the World Series because the karmic balance needs to be restored. As I texted Rick this morning, some 20-year-old Toronto fan is waking up with a Will-Smith-sized sports hangover—just like I woke up with a Joe-Carter-sized one back at Lehigh in 1993.

Don told me a funny story about Manu. He went as a Savannah Banana baseball player for Halloween. And Don said in that pivotal Game Six that the Phillies blew because of the Orion Kerkering error, Manu just lost it—screaming and running around the house.

We're back to Standard Time—the clocks switched last night. I prefer Standard. All feels right with my circadian rhythms again. I woke up around 5:20am without an alarm. I got here at 6:27, three minutes before sunrise.

I'm ready for the penultimate Paul Simon album, Stranger to Stranger, released in 2016—now somehow nine years ago. It was released the same year we trekked across Cumbria and North Yorkshire. I've decided next week will be Seven Psalms and then I'll start the Miracles and Wonder audiobook again. I don't think I listened to it last year. That should take me most of the way to the end of December.

The Welcoming the Stranger International Dinner is two weeks away. Mama Pajama, Anne Foote, and I will be in attendance. Two weeks after that, Thanksgiving. I'll be in Simsbury. Mom might go up a week early with Melissa; we'll see if Melissa gets her act together. But to her credit, she did help get the Radwyn living room looking nice, to Mom's satisfaction.

I was trying to explain to Don yesterday the state of Mom's cognitive impairment. I think I described it halfway decently. He said that at the reunion this year in Tennessee, he realized he was being treated like an old guy—he said, "When did that change?" It just happens that one year you're down there and suddenly it's different. It's coming for me too—hopefully, if I get to live that long.

Other than that, Halloween was Friday. Taylor went as a movie character called Coraline. We hit up the usual Radwyn spots, and Mom seemed to be in good spirits. This week is Election Day, but it's an odd year, so nothing major. A few bellwethers maybe—New Jersey governor, Virginia governor, a couple others. An avowed Democratic socialist, Zohran Mamdani, is on the New York mayoral ballot and will probably win. He annoys the Trump crowd and conservatives the same way Trump annoys people on the left, so it'll be interesting to watch that dynamic.

But other than that—just dancing the elephant dance. Trying to stay present, trying to stay grateful, trying to hold things dear. Still doing pretty well on this SSRI. Wait—did I take it today? That's funny. I don't think I did. I'll take it when I get back. Just saying it made me realize I forgot. I'll be home by 12 and I'll take it then. I don't need it when I'm here at Haverford. This is my spot. All right—love you, Dad.

November 9, 2025

Hey, Dad. I just listened to a bunch of these recordings to you, starting with the first one in 2021. In those days, before I was a Jeffersonian, I was in a pensive mood. It wasn't long after Mom's heart surgery. She was back home but still recovering. I had forgotten, until I listened to that, that four years ago we didn't go up to Nancy and Den's because Ed was quite ill and on his way—well, he was about to cross that bridge to the other side of the river.

Fast forward four years: it is November 9th, 2025, and we are 20 minutes past sunrise. I'm sitting here in front of the now-naked Yellowwood tree, watching the mist burn off the soccer field and preparing for my walk. That's good stuff. It's all good stuff, right, Dad? That's my motto.

I worked a five-day week. Yesterday, I was doing my normal Desert Island Discs archive episode in Woodland Cemetery and listening to Burl Ives. I'd listened to the Holly Jolly Christmas song many times, but I didn't know anything about him. One of the discs he picked was a Bach piece and it reminded me that you picked a Bach for one of your eight. Back reminded you of sitting in your Phoenixville office on a Friday working on a sermon.

I listened to the beginning of a Bach biography audiobook to situate him in my mind. I would have guessed he was born around the time of Ben Franklin, and I wasn't too far off. He was born about 20 years before Franklin, in 1685, in Germany. Ages ago. I'm glad I found that connective link between Burl Ives's tastes and yours.

We went to the DelKels last night. You would have enjoyed it. David was there, and so were Tiff, Taylor, and David's cat, Gojo. Penn State lost. They've had a terrible year football-wise, but they almost beat the number two team last night. They were at home in Happy Valley and lost on one of the best catches I've ever seen from an Indiana receiver with 35 seconds left.

Conversations were all over the place. David turned 26 last month and I was telling him that 26 is an auspicious year. I was 26 when he was born, and this year he's exactly half my age. You were 26 years and one month old—exactly his age last night—when you had Aaron and first became a father. Del was pressuring him to get married and have a grandkid. You know Del, he always thinks he's on the way out and wants to meet one of his grandkids before he kicks the bucket. Del says none of the grandparents in his family have ever met their grandkids. Oh, Aaron was also 26 when Marco was born on July 3rd, 1998.

I'm waiting for the sun to rise a little higher in the sky. I see it on the top of the trees in the pinetum, so it's time to get ready. It's the end of my Paul Simon cycle today, Dad. A tradition unlike any other. They all come to a chronological conclusion, but they never stop, can't stop, won't stop, because the cycle keeps on cycling. I never want to take it for granted that I'll make it through another. I mean, I hope I will, but life is unpredictable. Tragedies befall people all the time.

I'm listening to Seven Psalms, the one you didn't get to listen to. It is so beautifully named in a way that you would appreciate. Edie's voice makes a wonderful entrance at the end. It's the only Paul Simon album that isn't broken into specific songs on Spotify. His only piece of music that includes the lyrics "Welcoming the

Stranger." How apt that is, Dad, because next Saturday night, is the Welcoming the Stranger dinner. Mom has a $500 check in tow.

As for Mom she is chomping at the bit to send money to Aissata, so I have to walk that line between being encouraging but also holding back the reins. Like the grandfather character in Gilead, Mom would give away the shirt on her back if she could, which is a beautiful thing, but... moderation in all things. I never thought I would be the one saying that, but that's what age has done.

It's not cold today. In the audio I was listening to from 2021, it was bitingly cold. Today is around 50 degrees. Here is a sunbeam striking across the trees in front of me, so that tells me it's go time.

I wish I could believe your consciousness is out there, that you're hearing this, that you're having a good chuckle, that you're smiling. I don't believe that, but it amuses me to imagine it. It's useful for me to relate to the memory of you because it situates myself in my own life at 52.

You turned 52 in 1997, still toiling in the Phoenixville fields of the Lord—maybe about to preach one of your sermons this very morning in November. Maybe it had been written accompanied by a Bach cantata. I'm off to listen to my own Paul Simon cantata—love you, Dad.

November 16, 2025

Good morning, Dad. A breezy November morning. Back in your day this would've been the lead-up week to the Swarthmore soccer game, but not anymore; that game has already been played. It's windy but not cold. The car says 59 degrees. Mostly cloudy, but the sun is starting to peek over the eastern horizon.

Last week, I finished the Paul Simon chronology, so I'm going to re-listen to the Gladwell and Paul Simon audiobook Miracle and Wonder as we head toward Christmas. Get ready for Christmas Day, as the song goes.

The big news this week is last night we went to the Welcoming the Stranger International Dinner. The tradition is back, and it feels strong. Last year was the first one after COVID. New location in Warminster—great name, very David Brent. Two hundred ninety-two people. Patricia Lorenz is still the executive director. How appropriate that someone who went through the program as an immigrant now leads it.

They were going to honor Mom but I told them a few months ago that she wasn't in a place, cognitively or emotionally, to handle that. But she was there. I drove Mom and Anne Foote up to the dinner, and it was a beautiful night. They honored your Ardmore Junior High classmate, Lois, who is the past board chair.

As I said last year—there's still energy, still momentum, still life in that organization you imagined and brought into being back in the year of our Lord 1999. Seems like the blink of an eye… or maybe it seems like a long time ago. Either way, 26 years. Half my life. A lot happened in 1999: David Dzodzorme was born, I turned 26, you started Welcoming the Stranger. And now, here we are on this windy November morning with my deep morning voice and my coffee.

I refilled my coffee after my first cup at the Starbucks in Wynnewood. I was finishing my Bottom Line project on a short Dave Barry book, Dave Barry Slept Here: A Sort-of History of the United States. I wrote in it, and I'm going to leave it in a Little Free Library today. Not sure which one yet, but it's fun to create and then hide. Well—"hide." I don't sign it. I stay anonymous.

That's about it. This week I'll be in Ardmore Church for an a cappella concert, and then the Jefferson Gala. Twelve hundred people for that one. Melissa's coming down and taking Mom back up to Simsbury.

The Eagles play the Lions on Sunday Night Football tonight. After church, Mom is going to a 100th-birthday celebration in Fellowship Hall for Betty Birdsall—born into that congregation in 1925. If her birthday is around now, she probably graduated high school in '44. Incredible that she's been part of Ardmore Church all these years. I'll look her up on Ancestry tomorrow.

In the meantime and in between time—oh, one more thing: Rick and Melissa are still donors to Welcoming the Stranger. Their names were in the program. I sent a picture to Rick, and he said how meaningful it was to continue supporting your organization and how you had always been such a positive force in his life. Really touching.

Oh—and Barb White and her husband from Phoenixville were there, and the one and only Dan May, guitar-strummer extraordinaire, sunglasses and all. A lot to be grateful for. I'm going to keep walking, record something for Noah, then go see Mom and do it all up. Love you, Dad.

November 23, 2025

Good morning, Dad. I'm looking out at the soccer field and for the first time this season I see a thin layer of frost. Oddly enough, even though we're only ten minutes past sunrise, there are two young people on the far field—your old baseball field, now a lacrosse and field hockey field—kicking a soccer ball around in winter jackets and hoodies. Not sure what the story is there.

Behind me, the sun is rising in the east. I'm waiting for that perfect moment—twenty minutes after sunrise—to get out of the car and start my Paul Simon listen at the Yellowwood tree. It's only a degree or two above freezing on this late November morning. In your college years, this would have been the Sunday morning after the Swarthmore game. Not freshman year—that was the JFK year, and you played the following Wednesday—but sophomore, junior, and senior years: always the Saturday before Thanksgiving, always a rivalry game, and always, as I've since discovered, a loss. So you woke up each Sunday morning feeling … defeated.

Did you go to church on those particular Sundays? Did you go to church every Sunday during college? I don't know. If I were betting, I'd say three-quarters of the time. You weren't that far from church, and Nonnie would have wanted to see you there. I'll have to ask Don.

I'm not going to church this morning, Dad—no surprise there. Mom isn't going to Ardmore today either because she's in Simsbury. She'll be going to the United Methodist Church of Simsbury, former pastorate of the great Woody Eddins, who as far as I know is still getting his wood on down in Maryland. A very nice

guy. Child of Monroeville, Alabama. Hard to forget how my connection with Woody enlivened my walk across America when I passed through his and Harper Lee's hometown.

I was inside the sanctuary of Ardmore Presbyterian Church this week—a rare appearance for your youngest son. I went with Mom and Melissa to see the "Caro A Capo" concert, a set of sung psalms performed by a volunteer choral group Holly and Carol are part of. You would have loved it. It was exactly your vibe. I sat next to Julie—I'd saved a seat for her—and she came in with Katerina Cheronis. It was beautiful: about fifteen men and fifteen women, singing in that sanctuary that holds so much of our family's history. It felt like the perfect start to the holiday season.

I'm going to try to listen to more music and watch more movies this holiday season. We'll see how it goes. This week I started watching the Ken Burns American Revolution documentary with Tiff. That was the last museum you and I went to with JM and Matthew—the Museum of the American Revolution—and I thought the exhibit was affecting. It made you think about what it would've been like to live through it. If you had been a pastor in New England, or Connecticut, or even upstate New York—where you were a pastor 200 years later in 1975—would you have been a loyalist or a revolutionary? It's not as easy a question as our minds want it to be.

There are five more parts to the documentary, so hopefully Tiff and I will make it through—just like you and I made it through the very depressing Vietnam War series. It'll also be interesting when Andrea and Chris come up to see Mom in a few weeks—whether Andrea has watched it. She might think Ken Burns is too woke, but she knows him personally, so maybe that helps.

As I say this, an older gentleman is coming up the nature trail to my left, doing this funny run-walk in huge gloves and a sweatshirt with a giant Haverford "H" on it. I love these random little things I notice in this wild and wacky world we live in—that you lived in, once upon a time.

Mom is in Simsbury struggling a bit because she's aware of her memory loss, but she's trying to do the best she can. She told me she talked to Dennis about it, and I'm sure I'll have conversations with him as well. We're all adjusting to the new normal—what it means to watch after her and care for her. I don't think she'll be like Jerry Weaver's grandmother; I don't think she'll be a wanderer. But we'll see.

Let's not end on a down note. I have more chapters of the Paul Simon: Miracle and Wonder audiobook to listen to, which is exciting. Then I have breakfast with Patty at The Turning Point in Bryn Mawr at 8:30—good old Patty Turner, now 71. After that, just a nice regular Sunday. I'm sure Aaron and I will shoot the breeze for a while, and I may take myself to a movie at the Bryn Mawr Film Institute. Time will tell.

For now, I'm going to walk over toward those young chaps kicking the soccer ball around with a little Simon and Gladwell in my ears. Love you, Dad.

November 30, 2025

Good morning, Dad. It's 7:24 AM on the Sunday after Thanksgiving—which happens to be the last day of November. I'm parked in front of the Yellowwood about twenty minutes after sunrise. After a run of sunny

Sundays, this one is going to be mostly cloudy—it matches the mood of what feels like the first Sunday of early winter. The leaves are gone, temps are in the 30s, and I'm about to take my first sip of java.

What's the good word after coming back from Simsbury? Well, the good word is that I hit my return ETA on the button. I told Aaron on Wednesday when I picked up the RAV4 that we'd be back around 4 o'clock. I pulled into that parking spot at four bells on the dot. Thank you, thank you—everyone can sit down.

I knew traffic would be worse coming back, and sure enough, it wasn't too bad except for I-84 across Connecticut. It always sucks. On the way up, we took GWB, and it was a dream of a drive—four hours door to door, just me with Tiff and Taylor. So relaxing.

The trip back we had Mom. She was fine, though she constantly yawns when she's in the car. We took the Tappan Zee (er, the Mario Cuomo) and got her back safely. Her week with Nance and Den was a success. It didn't feel that long this time.

As for my time in Simsbury—well, it was as it always is, at least in these years since you haven't been there to inject your own dynamism. Nance and Den are constantly interrupting each other. I find it hilarious, but… Melissa was the worker bee, all over the place: cooking, organizing, looking after Mom. We did a puzzle. Tiff and I stayed at our usual hotel, which is very comfortable.

I got two walks in that I'd never done before: a Friday morning walk at Trinity College in Hartford, and a Saturday morning walk at the University of Hartford. And I got my traditional Friday afternoon walk by myself, listening to all things Gopnik. Adam Gopnik's brother, Blake, has written a biography of Albert C. Barnes—the chemist, art collector, connoisseur, museum starter. And it's making me finally want to go down to the Barnes. I'm hooked. All it took was a Gopnik writing a story about the guy.

I'd come across his story before—how Barnes died in a car accident near what's now Great Valley High School in the early 1950s. A whole sordid affair with a dangerous intersection: he demanded a stop sign be put there, they put it in, and then he came flying down the hill and didn't stop at the very sign he fought for, and got slammed by a truck. He and his dog. I learned he didn't have kids and was an absolutely committed intellectual brawler. The guy had some rough edges, growing up in rough spots in South Philly in the late 1800s—where I think the Navy Yard eventually was built. Back then they called it "the Neck." I'll have to look that up. He was born in 1872—101 years before me—and somehow graduated from Penn in 1889. Not sure how that timing worked. Anyway—enough about Albert Barnes.

I'm here at Haverford, continuing with Awe and Wonder, and I'm going to enjoy a nice walk and see what Malcolm, Paul, and Bruce have in store for me this morning. Oh—yesterday, after Aaron and I had just been talking about it, I saw a raven. Quoth the raven: Nevermore. It was a beautiful sight. They really are as big as hawks. Wild stuff.

We missed you at Thanksgiving, Dad, and we'll miss you at Christmas. This week, happily, I don't have much on tap besides the usual. Next Saturday I'm going to chat with Sherina about our beloved Wainwright's Trail, which should be fun. And then Heidi and Ann visit us in a little over a week. I need to tell Mom. All right, Dad. Let me bundle up and walk. Love you.

December 7, 2025

Good morning, Dad. I heard a wonderful song on the drive into Haverford. The best moments in life are unplanned. Sandy Patti's Bethlehem Morning came on as I was driving along Wynnewood Road. It was beautiful: a glowing sunrise and her lyrics about Jerusalem and Bethlehem and light breaking through. It all hit me at once. A transcendental moment for your hijo.

"What's the good word?" I asked myself this morning. Quite a bit, actually. My health is good. I'm wide awake. I slept well. I didn't "chase the night"—good job by you, Garthy. It's a clear morning, right around freezing—about 31 degrees. Yesterday we decorated Mom's apartment, so she'll feel good about that. She has a full day ahead at church: worship in the morning, then the Family Advent Night in the late afternoon. That will keep her busy. Heidi, Andrea, and Chris come tomorrow.

This week, I got to see our old friend Dr. Lammer—Lammerhead. He has a new dental hygienist named MJ, who is extremely thorough, and Lammer was in his usual good spirits. Jean at the front desk was her delightfully scattered self. I learned she grew up in Southwest Philly, which amused me.

I took the train out—you'd appreciate that—because I was working and basically played hooky for two and a half hours. Grabbed the train at Reading Terminal, rode out to Narberth, then caught the 4:00 back. Easy peasy, lemon squeezy. That was probably the most unusual part of the week.

I visited Don and Sherina yesterday. Sherina wanted to talk about her walk this summer with her brother and some friends. Because they only have seven days, they're going to start at the Richmond castle and finish at Robin Hood's Bay. That means the only national park they'll hit is the North Yorkshire Moors. But she and Don traveled to England a couple of years ago and spent a week in the Yorkshire Dales, so at least they know that landscape. Sherina really wants to end at the coast.

She and Don are going to go a week early and do some sightseeing. I recommended they visit some Lake District spots, stop in at St. Bee's for the start of the Coast to Coast, and see Grasmere, Wordsworth's house, and Patterdale—the place where we took that lovely boat ride on Ullswater up to Pooley Bridge.

Holly is a little worried about Sherina, who does have some very slight cognitive decline. She's not as sharp as she once was. But she's nowhere near where Mom is. As I've said many times, Mom has almost completely lost her sense of time. She can't situate herself chronologically anymore. It's really hard, but we're doing our best.

I can see the sun peeking over the roof of the infirmary. This is when I like to head out into what today a frosty landscape. What will I see, Dad? A deer? Haven't seen one in a while. A fox? That would be amazing. I'll definitely see my friends the crows and the squirrels. And who knows—maybe something unexpected. The beaver in the pond a few weeks ago was a nice surprise.

I'm going to d pick back up with the Awe and Wonder audiobook. I'll hear what there is to hear, see what there is to see, smell what there is to smell. I've got my coffee—my second cup. Let me take a sip. I ordered a refill so I'd have something warm in my hands. All right, Dad. I'll talk to you next week. Love you.

Winter

December 21, 2025

Good morning, Dad. We meet again in spirit on the hallowed grounds of Haverford College—established in the year of our Lord 1833, though I should probably put that in quotes, because I can only imagine this place back then was barely a single structure. It celebrated its 100th anniversary when your dad was enrolled here, and it'll celebrate its 200th within the next decade. Not the blink of an eye in human terms, but on a geological scale barely a blip.

It's nine minutes before sunrise and there is a pink hue in the clouds as the sun gets ready to meet me over the eastern horizon. Today is the winter solstice—the official, astronomical beginning of winter. I've got three months to endure. Buckle up. Winter is here.

Technically, the solstice hits at 10 a.m., by which point Mom and I will be settled into a pew at Ardmore Church, waiting for Michelle and JM and the crew (time jump: not quite, we got a flat tire and didn't get there until 10:10). They rolled into town yesterday evening in their new car and I had dinner with them at the Radwyn. We were in good spirits, though I told Tiff when I got home that I was reminded how draining it is to be around Matthew—even though I'm very sympathetic to how his mind works.

Oh—hold on. A fox just trotted across your soccer field. Now he's right by the goalpost. Did he just take a wizz? He's looking at me. Oh, wow. Now there's a second fox. Dueling foxes! This one is even closer—right under the Yellowood, moving toward the wooden benches. It has a nice shock of black fur. That's incredible. I wonder if they're related. I've never seen two foxes here before. That feels like a good omen, Dad—my Nancy Reagan moment of the day. She had her astrology; I've got fox sightings at Haverford College.

Okay, back on track. Anyway—Matthew. The way his anxiety manifests is hard for me. Last night he was so talkative, jumping into every topic, and what he contributes is, frankly, nonsense. It's not his fault—that's how he's wired—but nothing of interest is said. JM is different—he's a regular guy—but his topics don't grab me either. Michaela, for whatever reason, doesn't trigger me that way Matthew does. I have an easy time with her, and with Michelle too.

They're here for two more days and with Mom's inability to keep things straight I'm the master of ceremonies. Today, I'll worship with Mom for the first time in years, then Don's family is coming over around 3pm. Later, Tiff and Taylor will come by for pizza.

This past week was busier than usual. I had my annual physical—pretty good shape overall. Blood pressure was down, which is good. Weight's up, which isn't. We also had our department Christmas party. I talked with a guy who knows Leo Scoda. Small world. Another week in the books. The next couple of weeks should be easier—Christmas Day off, probably some half days, then New Year's Day too.

I'm going to need the rest. I've been trying to make this Christmas one Mom can enjoy, because I honestly don't know what her state of mind will be like next Christmas. I want to give her one more that has some semblance of normality. It's tough, Dad. You can parse it any way you want, but Mom has dementia—or is very close to it. Her mind is deteriorating rapidly.

My feelings about Aaron are complicated. There's resentment there, though I've let some of it go. He helps, but not as much as he could. Yesterday, he brought up Trump with Mom, and I was like, "Dude, what are

you doing?" He has deep resentments toward Mom that, interestingly, he doesn't feel toward you. He has more than his fair share of misogyny in his mental makeup, so none of that is surprising.

It's now 7:17 a.m., two minutes from sunrise. I've got about two hours left on Paul Simon's audiobook, Awe and Wonder. The guy can't stop performing— he's heading to Europe at the age of 84, even with one working ear. I'm going to listen and enjoy a beautiful morning walk. I still can't believe I saw those two foxes. Good omens are afoot. Love you, Dad.

Sunday, December 28

Hello, Daddy-O. I'm going off the cuff this morning. Didn't take even a second to prepare or think about what I wanted to tell you from the week just past—which includes Christmas. I've just pulled into Haverford College and everything is coated in a thin layer of snow and ice from a storm that came through Friday night. I'm the only car parked near the observatory. Just me. Gotta take a first sip of Jav. Oh, it's good stuff, Dad. It's all good stuff.

Christmas week went well. The last time I talked to you was when JM, Michelle, Matthew, and Mikayla were here. That Sunday turned out to be a real energy drain. I'd planned to go to church, and I did—but Mom and I got a flat tire on the way. I rolled the car to Midas, JM and Michelle picked us up there, we made it to the service, then spent the afternoon hosting Don and Sherina's family at the West Wing.

After that I went back to West Philly, picked up the Foxes, came back out to the burbs, had dinner with Julie and Michelle's crew at the Radwyn again. By the end of the day, I was completely wiped—especially by Matthew's energy, but also just the whole process of hosting, being in charge, and navigating Mom's cognitive stuff. Tiff said I looked as zombified as she's ever seen me.

Monday, thankfully, we didn't go into Philadelphia with JM and Michelle's crew. We stayed out here, did a bunch of little things and lunched in Ardmore. I took Matthew to the cemetery to see you and John. Then we met Julie briefly at the Stratford Farmers Market—much more my speed. Still, Matthew's anxiety is challenging for me—his seems to trigger mine. I can't just roll with it as I do with most everything else.

The rest of the week was golden. On Tuesda,y I left work a little early and we did Christmas Adam with Mom. That was a really nice night: pancakes, bacon, a ton of gifts for Taylor, stocking stuff for me and Tiff. Just lovely. Mom seemed to enjoy it, too.

Since Tuesday, I haven't been back out to the suburbs. Wednesday, Aaron brought Mom in for Christmas dinner and Tiff knocked it out of the park. Food was delicious. Tyrone came by from 1-3:30pm. Mom was super early, as usual. I'm definitely a chip off the old block of both of you that way.

Thursday—sorry, going backward—Christmas Eve, I mostly did my thing in the city. Half day at work. Christmas Day itself was Thursday, Friday was work again. Very relaxing. Nobody in the office.

Yesterday—what did I do yesterday? Oh, right, I did come out here. Hung out at the Spencers' house on Golf View in the morning. It was chill. I indulged a bit in my masturbatory arts, but without the manic

energy I remember from last year. I'll take that as a small win, even though I did spend some money—so maybe not a win, maybe a draw. So 0-0-1 is my record for this winter. Stay tuned.

Which brings me to today. I woke up rested. Some days I have relaxed energy, some days I don't. Today, I do. I've been reading more—always good. Hello, squirrel. Last night I watched a movie called One Battle After Another on HBO Max. I'm just… engaging in life, you know? As 2025 comes to a close, someone on Reddit asked people to describe their year in one word. The top answers were things like "terrible," "fucked," "suffering," etc., etc. I thought, Yup—that's the human condition in a microcosm. My one-word as "Aiiiiight." Because it was. It was life. Just life.

I've got two more listens left to finish this Paul Simon audiobook. I've told myself that on New Year's Morning I'll come out here to experience the first dawn. I'll finish it then and start back up in 1964 with Simon & Garfunkel on Sunday. Time to hit the ancient road, Dad. That's where the song lives when the wires are hushed. The quiet Haverford dawn beckons.

January 4, 2026

Hey Dad — Happy New Year. I'm raising my coffee to you this morning because it's officially 2026. I may have spilled a little in the process, but that's alright — good for the soul. Today's January 4th, the day after Claire's 51st birthday, and I'm here three minutes before sunrise. First car in the lot, staring at a bare Yellowwood tree. Not a bad way to start the year.

This past week didn't feel like a normal one, with the holiday day off and the half day mixed in, but this coming week I'll get back into the rhythm of things. I was up for an hour in the middle of the night last night, but fell back asleep around four in the morning, crapped out, yawning, longing my life away — as Paul Simon would say — and slept until 6:30.

I've been listening to a book called The Gods of New York, about the city in the late '80s — right in my wheelhouse, the years when I was 13, 14, 15.

What I really wanted to tell you about is a new research project I've taken on at Haverford. I've unofficially adopted the Class of '43 — the "Fighting 43s." I came across them while looking into a gift from a deceased Jefferson Medical College alumnus. I noticed in his obituary that he was a Haverford grad from that class. That sent me down the rabbit hole. Their yearbook is online and the class had been significantly thinned because of the war. They technically graduated in December of '42 but called themselves the Class of '43. There's a photo of about sixty of them standing in front the Seniors' Entrance to Founders Hall, and I got it into my head to research each one and see how their lives unfolded.

The Jefferson guy, James Gilbert, lived to 100. Another classmate was John Whitehead — original partner at Goldman Sachs, later Deputy Secretary of State under George Shultz in the Reagan years. It took me an embarrassingly long time to connect him to the Whitehead Campus Center at Haverford, where I've sat so many times reading and writing, looking out toward the athletic building where your Varsity Cup Award is hung.

Every one of these men is a story. The class has always felt personal to me because of Edmunds Jennings Lee, who died in an air crash flying "the Hump" between China and India during World War II. That yearbook photo was taken in November of '42; he died in the summer of '44 — barely a year and a half later. There was another classmate I've found so far who died young as well, a Pittsburgh guy nicknamed "The Senator," Senator Styles, who died of heart disease in his 30s. Whitehead even mentions him in his memoir — though he misremembers him as having been expelled, which he absolutely wasn't.

I could talk about Haverford forever, but on the family front: Mom is chugging along, and we're adapting week by week. Nancy is coming down in a couple of weeks to spend eight days with her, and Aaron's going to clear out for that stretch. They can putter around the Main Line together.

Music-wise, I'm circling back to where I started — Paul Simon and Art Garfunkel. About to hit the Simon & Garfunkel years again, starting with "Hey, Schoolgirl" and then Wednesday Morning, 3 A.M. The whole chronology takes me about four months, which would land me around April — right when I'm thinking of taking another week and doing a college walking tour.

Time to bundle up and get walking. Love you. Miss you.

January 11, 2026

Good morning, Daddy-O. I'm coming to you under cloudy skies a minute or two after sunrise — I think it's January 11th, though I could be wrong. I've been wrong before and I'll be wrong again. It's not too cold, and the Weather Channel app says the sun will peek out eventually. It's peaceful. And it's always a good time for a walk, no matter the weather.

I started the morning texting with Rick about the death Bob Weir, the Grateful Dead guitarist. He was more important to Rick than to me, though I've been dipping my toe into the Dead lately. Weir was born in '47 —Mom's year — and it got us talking about music and passage of time and all of that jazz. I listened to one of the songs Rick sent me as I headed out.

Musically, I'm gearing up for album number two of the Simon & Garfunkel phenomenon — the first one they rushed out after the surprise success of the electric version of "The Sound of Silence." Hat tip, as always, to our guy Tom Wilson — not the West Rupert farm boy, but the Harvard-educated Black producer who decided to turn the quiet acoustic song into something larger and fuller sounding while Paul Simon was off playing cafés in Europe.

Their first album wasn't even called Sound of Silence — it was Wednesday Morning, 3 A.M., which honestly isn't my favorite song on that record. Still, history worked itself out. To this day, I'd say Paul Simon's three most "known" songs are probably "Graceland," "The Sound of Silence," and "Bridge Over Troubled Water," with "The Boxer" not far behind.

I spent about an hour at the Wynnewood Starbucks annotating another Peanuts book — one that was originally a gift to Aaron. He pointed out that the big 8½×11 Peanuts books were all gifts he received, while the smaller ones were ones you or John had gotten earlier on.

I have Tuesday off and I canceled Mom's doctor's appointment, which gives me a free morning. I'm planning to walk Haverford, sit at the café in the Whitehead Center — Class of '43 territory — and do some more writing. In the afternoon, Mom and I are going to see Roger McKinney to start a funeral-expense account and maybe grab lunch. Quality time, as they say. It also reminds me I need to spend some more quality time with Taylor Tot — mental note added to the list.

As for the wider world: Trump is Trumping, ICE is creating havoc, and there's been another tragic shooting that's sparked protests. Mom is thinking about going to a demonstration today outside Lower Merion HS. She asked for my "guidance" — such a Mom word. I don't want to discourage her, but my first thought was purely practical: where is she going to park? I suggested 107 and then walking up the high school.

What are world affairs to people in the spirit world, anyway? Not much. Not anything, in fact. I don't know if I'm looking forward to death, but I do hope I'm not afraid of it. It's part and parcel of this whole gift of life. I read a beautiful interview with George Saunders in the New York Times and want to listen to it again — lots of insight into the complexities of being human. So much of what I've learned through journaling seems to come back to the same thing: trying to be Present. This moment is a gift. This breath is a gift. The more I settle into that, the fuller the experience while I still have this consciousness I call "me."

Alright — I'm heading a little too far down the reflective rabbit hole. Time to get these legs moving and put on some Paul Simon. Love you.

January 18, 2026

Hello Daddy-O – The weather is weathering this morning. It's sunrise, though you wouldn't know it. The sky is a solid blanket of grayish white, and what's truly white is the ground, completely covered with snow. We got a few inches yesterday, and it started again early this morning. I'm the only one in the parking bay by the observatory. I never miss my appointed rounds.

I spent two hours at Starbucks bottom-lining my Peanuts book—my second—and I find it enjoyable on so many levels. I love the paper it's printed on. I love reading along and occasionally chuckling. And I love looking at it now from a distance of forty or fifty years, noticing how the humor lands differently all the while thinking about Charles Schulz's life as he was writing it.

I discovered Schulz's second marriage took place the exact same week I was born. His first marriage had been on the rocks for a while. By the fall of '73, the divorce was finalized and, almost immediately after, he remarried. Two wives, both with J names. Joyce first, then Jean. Jean the Bean, as she was called. I'm not sure if she was actually a Bean, but by that point Sparky had quite a few spark plugs in his bank account. The story goes that they met at an ice rink in California while both taking their kids to skating practice.

We've got guests here in these parts. Nancy, Melissa, and Danny came down last night. Melissa and Danny are heading back up today, and Nancy is staying eight days with Mama Pajama. Aaron is in parts unknown. Mom thinks Las Vegas. I'm almost certain it's not. My guess is Atlantic City or King of Prussia, using the $1,500 I gave him from Mom's account. This time, though, I also gave myself $1,500. I'm not entirely sure yet what I'll do with it.

I put the $19,000 Julie gave me into Tiff and my house-savings account, so good job by me. There were times in my life when I would have squirreled that away for more questionable purposes, but this time I was a smarter puppy.

This week was the one-year anniversary of Robert's death, at the estimable age of ninety. I emailed Julie to let her know I was thinking of her, and she wrote back, which was nice. She also stopped by to see Mom this week. She's up in New York City now for a weekend trip. I meant to email Babak yesterday but didn't get to it. I'll do that today or tomorrow to let him know I'm thinking of him, too.

It's a holiday weekend, celebrating Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. There's talk about FBI recordings that may be released in a couple of years which could complicate how people think about King's legacy. Like a lot of people, he was complex, with a private life that didn't always match the public image. It reminds me how much all of us live behind a curtain in many ways, navigating between who we are in public and who we are in private.

A couple of other serendipities from the week. I learned about another Garth at Salem, Garth Kenyon, class of '72, whom you would have known tangentially when you first moved there. You later did his dad's and mom's funerals in '79 and '83 at Mary McClellan Funeral Home. He's still alive and living in the area, so I emailed him, and he wrote me back. My theory is that, while you didn't name me after him, he may have been the first time the name Garth entered your consciousness. You gave the invocation at his graduation ceremony where he was salutatorian, and you would have known him from athletics back then. From everything I've heard, he was a really nice, really smart guy, and he sent me a thoughtful email. He was also a left-hander, so there you go. He even remembered that at his dad's funeral you told him you had a son named Garth. It's nice to have that story buttoned up in my mind.

The other thing was about Paul Simon, our guy. I stumbled across clips from a Frederick Wiseman documentary from 1968 called High School, filmed at Northeast Philadelphia HS. One clip showed an English teacher doing a poetry lesson using the song "Dangling Conversation" as text. She read the lyrics aloud and then played the song on an old reel-to-reel. The football was in black and white, and it felt incredibly poignant. Wouldn't you know it, that's the album I've been listening to this week, Parsley, Sage, Rosemary and Thyme. Everything does come around again.

I'm going to let the sun rise a little higher and the snow pile up some more. I might do another recording later, but I wanted to say hello to you first thing, as always. I miss you, Dad. Love you.

February 1, 2026

Good morning, Daddy-O. The hum you hear in the background is the car heater. This might be the coldest Sunday morning walk I'll take all year. I just looked at the clock—7:02, seven minutes before sunrise—and the "feels like" temperature is -5 degrees. Holy shit.

I'm here earlier than usual, and if I'm being honest about why—and why wouldn't I be, since you're very dead and can't judge me—it's because I have a 9:00 phone appointment with my friend from Buffalo. We're going to have a fantasy role-play phone-sex session.

I don't think she and I talked last week. We talk every couple of weeks. I've "known" her since before you were dead—I think the first time we talked was shortly after we got back from England, around when I met Tiff. We've only met once in person, and I can't remember the year—maybe 2021. We did an in-person role-play then, but we didn't have sexual relations (as Billy Boy once famously said). We're mutual-masturbation partners. It's a nice little safe secret world we inhabit together over the phone.

Lately, Tiff and I haven't had much physical intimacy, which I'm okay with. I know it's cyclical—it comes and goes. She's been dealing with skin problems that frustrate her and probably make her feel less sexy. It's also winter, when she has less energy. And this fall and into winter I was also coming to terms with a lower libido because of the SSRI. We've known each other almost ten years. I don't have to tell you—sexuality in a long-term relationship is variable to say the least.

Aaron and I go back and forth on two questions. One is: when was the last time you and Mom were sexual with each other? And the other is: did you ever have sex with anyone else? On that last one, Dad, I kind of think you did. I don't know. Aaron doesn't think so. But I think you were too much like me and Aaron—good at being secretive, carrying a lot of guilt, wrestling with it like Jacob with his angel. That stuff shows up in your private writings about evil and Satan—though I can't say "Satan" without thinking of Dana Carvey. It doesn't matter either way. It's only my intuition.

So that's why I'm here early. It's frigid now, but it'll be warm once I turn the heat up at 250 Golf View. I'll see Mom after church. I hope that doesn't throw off her schedule, but this week has already been different because of the snow. Last Sunday I didn't get here—Sunday morning was right in the middle of the storm. Even now, I'm sure I'll be walking through snow that hasn't been disturbed by a single footprint. It'll be a crunchy walk.

I have Bridge Over Troubled Water queued up. Such a great album, such a great song. If anyone ever went out on top, it was Simon and Garfunkel. Absolute peak. I was trying to think of athletes who retired on top. Jordan could have, but didn't—he came back. It's hard to walk away. Speaking of great athletes, 38-year-old Novak Djokovic just lost at the Australian Open to 22-year-old Carlos Alcaraz in four sets. He gave it everything, but age is undefeated. You can't outlast a 22-year-old who's that good.

Work this week was… uneventful. I'm still walking in each day despite the snow. It's going to stay cold until Valentine's Day, so nothing's melting anytime soon. I have a full five-day work week, but Molly and Steve will both be out—the Grand Poobahs—so it might be quiet. Whenever I think that, it never is, so I'm retracting the statement.

We'll see what rabbit holes I fall down. Last week it was the Central Park Five—the jogger case from 1989. I'm finishing that book about New York in the late '80s, so it was on my mind. Ray and I went back and forth on it a lot. Every week it's something different.

February is not my favorite month, though at least it's short. Don turns 70 on February 11. I'm trying to think of a gift Mom and I can get "the Professor". In late March, Julie turns 80. It's windy—the American flag across what used to be your old baseball field is whipping around—so I'm going to wrap my scarf around my face, double-hood my head and get walking. Love you, Dad.

February 8, 2026

Good morning, Dad— we'll do it live! Live is right now: 7:30am on the dot. The world is about to be drenched in sunlight, but don't be fooled—it's fucking cold. I took a screenshot of the "feels like" temperature: -10. Insane. Last Sunday, seated on Founder's Hall porch, I told Noah that day would probably be the coldest walk I'd take all year, only to be proven wrong a week later.

The wind's howling, too. Not as bad as yesterday, but the flag is stretched almost full-mast, blowing west to east. Enough of a weather report. What are we even doing here, Dad? Weather is weather. It comes and it goes. Time for a sip of Jav… give me a second. <Long Sip> That's good stuff.

I slept in today—didn't mean to, but I slept later than I have in a while. No idea why. My lower-left back quadrant (still my nemesis) is a little sore, but not too bad. I know exactly why it's sore, though. I was getting it on with Tiff yesterday. First time in a long time and, if I'm being honest, totally worth it. I'll take the soreness.

Today's Super Bowl Sunday, with no Philadelphia team involved. Seahawks versus the Patriots. We're heading to Tiff's brother's place in Northeast Philly, so there'll be a drive, but that's fine. I like Tyrone, and I get to see the crazy dog with the cinder block head, Bo.

At Ardmore Church, the "Souper Bowl" has been on Mom's mind. She's still on the MAC committee, still doing the Lord's work. I'll be dropping her off at church today. (Note from the future: she didn't go to church at all – she got totally confused about timing and had a mini spiral.)

Other than that, it was my first five-day work week in a while. Pretty quiet—some people were out, nothing headline-worthy. Just a comfortable week. It's February 8th, and February is… well, February. Cold. The trick is to stay present and enjoy the little things: the sunlight, having Paul Simon's first solo album in my earholes, just moving through the day.

It occurred to me today (and I could be way off here) that the year your grandfather tried his hand at a pastorate lined up with the U.S. entering WWI. Was he draft dodging? Were you draft dodging in 1967 when you ducked into draft-protected Princeton Seminary? Just asking questions—not that I give a damn. I would've been draft dodging, too.

None of you guys were fighters. You, John, Don, Reverend John—no temper there. I reread that sarcastic Ursinus yearbook blurb about him, full of jokes about alcohol. He must've been quite the crusader. We have crusader blood in our veins from that side of the family. Not so much from the Freeland side. I like to avoid crusaders. Well, except Noah. He is my token crusader friend.

It's a shame—I would've loved to talk with Rev. John Poorman before his nervous breakdown in the early 1930s. A hundred years ago would have been perfect. 1926. Boom. Give me one day, Dad. Just one. Wake me up, let me find my way into his office on Race Street. Let me call on John H. Poorman and talk to him – adult to adult – about his church's evangelizing impulse in the Far East.

All right. I'm going to bundle up and indulge in the Gospel According to the (solo) Paul. Love you, Dad.

February 15, 2026

Hello, Daddy-O. Here we are, smack dab in the middle of February. I've pulled into my parking slot right on time—7:30 a.m. Mostly cloudy sky, not too cold as February goes, and I'm caffeinated and feeling good. There's still a lot of snow on the ground. I think it'll stick around for a few more weeks even as the temperatures creep up. It will be a crunchy walk through the Pinetum meadow.

What do I need to update you on, Dad? There's always something simmering in the rice cooker of life to share with you on these Sunday mornings. The highlight of the week, without question, was that Tiff and I went to a Brandi Carlile concert at the arena formerly known as the Wells Fargo Center—home of the mediocre Sixers and the slightly-better-than-mediocre Flyers. We went Tuesday night. Brandi is quite the artist. Tiff knew that better than I did going in, but as you taught me to do with Broadway musicals, I listened to the setlist a bunch of times beforehand.

The opening band was The Head and the Heart, who I also really like. There was something especially powerful about discovering Brandi Carlile as a new fan—it made the experience more enthralling. There's something about being in an arena with ten or twelve thousand people, all vibing to the same music, that feels deeply pleasurable to the human soul. It probably taps into something ancient. You can get flashes of that feeling at sporting events—if your team is doing well—but that's a fifty-fifty proposition. With concerts, it feels like a hundred percent. She put on a great show.

It was the first night of her "Being Human" tour—her first arena tour ever. She's from the Pacific Northwest and has been in the music game a long time, but this is her first time performing on the biggest stages imaginable (well, I guess that would be The Linc, like Beyond and Jay-Z did). A couple days after Philly, she was headed to Madison Square Garden for a few nights, and now she's bouncing all over the country.

You and I always liked to name our favorite performers in Broadway shows we went to together, so I'll share that my favorite moment was when her band stepped forward as background singers and she did a song she recorded with Elton John, "Who Believes in Angels Anyway." Really beautiful. There were a lot of great moments, though.

Tiff loved it. It was our pre-Valentine's Day date—and what made it even better is that she paid for the tickets. I paid for the parking: 40 bones, Dad. And another 20 for popcorn and water. Such is life in modern-day America.

Valentine's Day was yesterday. Mom and I had lunch together—tasty chicken salad from the Bakery House and a cherry pie. Tiff and I spent most of the afternoon and evening binge-watching a reality/game-show hybrid on Peacock: The Traitors.

Your brother Don—Donald Harris—turned 70 this week. I think it was Wednesday. Mom reached out because she wanted to bring over a card and gift we'd gotten him, but he and Sherina were in Florida.

Seventy. It's good innings to make 70. Great innings to make 80. Extraordinary longevity to hit 90. John didn't make it to 70, and I think about that a lot. It can feel like he was cheated out of some years, even though I know that's a human construction and there are no guarantees. Ergo: live in the present.

As I say that, I'm sitting here in my Toyota Camry, filthy from snow and salt, with Paul Simon's second solo album queued up—There Goes Rhymin' Simon, which I think opens with "Kodachrome." A fun song, full of the energy of life. L'Chaim!

I'm going to hoof it out of here, enjoy some music, hit the Acme, see Mom, chill with Aaron, and do my usual Sunday thing—unless something unpredictable happens, which life is always capable of. At this age, I kind of like predictable, so let's hope for that and deal with the other if it comes. Boom. Love you, Dad.

February 22, 2026

Hey Dad, I was about to say we could sniff spring, but that would be a lie. Yesterday I was here at Haverford taking a different route, and the soccer team was out on the artificial turf field practicing. The weather was nice—but snow's coming again this afternoon. They're saying up to 10 inches. To that I say: me no likey. But what am I gonna do? The weather's gonna weather.

I'm getting my walk in at the usual time. It's 7:30 on the dot. It's not raining yet, and for the first week in a while there's no snow on most of the ground, which means I can take my normal route without crunching through the lower meadow and nearly busting my ass.

Today's the beautiful, the wondrous, Still Crazy After All These Years Sunday walk. Paul doesn't make me wait—the title song has pole position on the album. Those melancholic organ chords come in right away and transport me to what I imagine it felt like to be in Manhattan in the mid-1970s. I picture Paul on the Upper West Side because I know he had that place along Central Park West. I imagine him up at four in the morning, staring out the window at the city and the park below, doing what we all do: feeling the mind whirl, feeling that low-grade anxiety about whatever uncertainty is plaguing our consciousness.

Speaking of whirling minds, we went out to Sanatoga last night—Tiff, Taylor, me, mom and Patrice. It was Patrice's first visit to the Dzordzorme home. We saw Del and Kelly, and David was there as well, along with David's cat, Gojo. We were belatedly celebrating Taylor's 13th birthday.

As usual, Del and David got into it—debates about the global world order and then, somehow, Ghanaian history. Kwame Nkrumah was discussed like an after-dinner port. It was funny to observe the father-son interplay. David, as I may have mentioned, has a conspiratorial bent—supercharged, I think, by what I call the YouTube phenomenon, where you can always find something to reinforce your priors. The algorithms don't nudge you toward self-doubt. Doubt is, ideally, what the hard sciences try to institutionalize—structured skepticism, other scientists testing your claims. Not that everyone does it perfectly, but at least the method is there. There is less method to the madness of debate within the soft sciences. Though whether some of them operate like sciences in the same sense is another question entirely. History, religion, politics, economics. The list goes on and on. Anyway, all of it made for a lively conversation.

One thing that came up was Mom having lived through the Vietnam war era. Someone asked, half-jokingly, "how Grandpa Sturge got out of the draft". I found myself explaining how the draft exemption laws evolved in '67 and '68—how the carve-out for seminarians remained around while the exemptions for regular graduate students disappeared.

Which made me think: if you were here, I'd ask whether you ever seriously considered Union Theological Seminary in NYC instead of Princeton. Probably not—but I'd also ask what you were taught about Reinhold Niebuhr. By the time you were in seminary he was already this towering figure, almost the religious conscience of American intellectual life. I was reading about him this week and realized I didn't know much. I'd be curious where your theology aligned with his, and where it didn't.

But for now, Paul Simon is about to be soaring through my synapses, there is a dry spell between bands of rain, and I have the opportunity appreciate a simple walk and inhabit the present.

Oh, and I'm finished bottom-lining the Calvin and Hobbes book, Revenge of the Baby-Sat. It'll probably end up in a little free library—maybe when I'm down in D.C. Every time I read those comic strips, I think of you. Alright, Dad. Let's hope next time we talk I'm not staring down an imminent winter storm. Love you.

March 1, 2026

Good morning, Daddy-O. It's 7:19 by the car clock, and I'm looking out at a deserted Haverford College—waiting to be walked, waiting to be explored yet again. There's always something new to see.

I was up and out early this morning. I started to audio record my bottom-lining text in the Calvin and Hobbes comic strip collection. And this week, for the first time, I paid for a ChatGPT subscription. Unlimited conversations. It's been illuminating, to say the least –a sort of cosmic intelligence

Like any new toy, it feels amazing at first encouner. Soon enough it'll be woven into the fabric of my life and won't seem so shiny or impressive. I do love that I can train it to reflect my skepticism and curiosity—my desire to see both sides of an issue and not fall prey to confirmation bias. I've already had some interesting back-and-forths.

I used it to go deep into the debate Del and David were having about Ghana's economic development as it compares to countries that were more Western-aligned after independence—specifically Malaysia. That led me into Zimbabwe's economic development since independence and how it contrasts with places like Zambia and Botswana. There's really no end to the rabbit holes it can lead me down. That's part of the joy… and part of the danger. At some point, I have to tear myself away and interact with the natural world.

Which is what I'm about to do.

The weather finally looks like it's turning. There are whispers in my weather app that next Sunday—knock on wood—it could be in the 60s, maybe even low 70s. Today might be—famous last words—my last wintry Sunday walk. There's a smattering of snow left, though I'm looking out over your old soccer field and it's mostly clear.

Today I have One Trick Pony on the docket. I talked to ChatGPT about it—it mentioned a couple things about "Late in the Evening," that Brian De Palma had once considered directing the movie, and something about the song "How the Heart Approaches What It Yearns." I'm excited, as always, to listen to my weekly album, take my stroll, and be in the world.

Jesus purportedly said, "the kingdom of heaven is within you." To me, that means the only eternity or transcendence we get is whatever moment we're living in right now. I'm going to try to embody that on this walk. Sometimes that's easier when music is in my ears. Certain lines will make me think of you. Certain lines will make me think of other people who matter to me—both here and departed. Then I'll go see Mom, and the rest of the day will chug along.

I've come up with an idea to celebrate Mom's birthday that I think she'll like. Now I need the discipline to write down the tasks and start checking off the list. I'll update you when I get going on that. Oh—and I discovered one of my headlight bulbs needs replacing. Que sera, sera, right?

Time to turn the car off and do the most elemental human thing possible: walk and listen. It's not late in the evening. It's early in the morning.

Love you, Dad.

March 8, 2026

Good morning, Daddy-O, on this first Sunday of Daylight Saving Time. There's a mist rising off the Haverford ground. It's peaceful—quite beautiful. I slept later than usual because I'm not much of an alarm-clock guy and the clocks sprung forward. But I pulled in here at 7:39 am, nonetheless. Not too shabby.

I've gotta tell you, Dad, ever since I paid for a monthly ChatGPT membership I've been on a creative tear. I'm off to the races on my long-overdue project of turning my Walk to New Orleans into a book. I'm keeping up with all my daily journaling and annotating projects. I'm making personal cards—I did one for Noah this week for his 50th birthday, and next up is Julie's 80th.

I've started thinking about a Grandpop biography project. Nothing overly formal—just something I could put up on Archive.org so future descendants could have a sense of the arc of his life. People like Marco, Ivan, Pete, etc.

I'm sure there will be other projects. I even went into work yesterday morning—a Saturday—and spent three hours doing personal writing and organizing. It felt great. I imagine John looking down and nodding approvingly.

I won't get into Mom stuff right now. That mental slide is slow but… unremitting. I think that's the word. Hopefully she gets off to church today without any problems.

Oh—and another project: I've started discussing Paul Simon songs with ChatGPT based on what album I listen to each week. This week it's the incomparable Hearts and Bones. Last night I was compiling some of the letters I wrote to Claire after we were no longer together—the ones I never sent—and talking them through with ChatGPT. I feel ready for Hearts and Bones with its two soaring statements on love, and love lost: the title track, of course, and "Train in the Distance."

We loved both of those songs. I can never listen to that lyric from H&B without thinking about how this was your favorite line:

"Ohh I / Ohh I don't know nothing about … nothing about no Mexico…"

None of us know nothing about no Mexico, Dad. We know what we know. We see the world through our individual lens. It's hard to put ourselves into the shoes of others—and yet we keep rolling along. We create bonds. We decide what to share and what to keep to ourselves.

Sometimes those calculations help maintain a strong relationship. Sometimes they don't, and friction emerges. When that happens … conversations hard and wild. I love that phrase. It's a whole short story contained in four words.

I was thinking how a few short sentences can carry a universe inside it. The final paragraph of an unsent letter I wrote to Claire in January 2020—the one I hid in the library at Lehigh—comes to mind.

> "I'll probably never see you again, but in my mind's eye there you are, walking languidly from Maginnes Hall after our government class. You are an ideal in my mind. And I'm just a kid who is far from a hero, wanting to believe there is a story in which a guy like me ends up with a girl like you.
>
> Turns out there was, and there isn't."

Ultimately, there was no Mexico for Claire and me.

Let me shift gears and say that, as always, I'm grateful—grateful that I can walk, grateful for Paul Simon in my ears, grateful for friends, a supportive family, a loving wife, and a job to go to Monday through Friday. Finally, I'm grateful that spring is almost here—temperatures this week are supposed to hit the 70s.

I miss you, Dad. You'll always be with me on these walks.

March 15, 2026

Hello Daddy-O. I'm coming to you live at 7:34 a.m. from you-know-where. I had to park one berth over today—rude! It's 40 degrees out, a mix of wispy white clouds and blue sky, and it is definitely—say it with me, Kyle Rullman—peaceful.

I got a long text from Kyle this week. He updated me on all things Sugar Tree Farm. Is it Sugar Tree? Sugar Maple? Sugar Tree? I can never remember. Anyway, his main stress right now is money, so he's thinking about developing a wedding venue down at The Grove. I'll fill you in more as I learn more. But, as they say, life is lifing for ole Kyle.

Cole and Shay are about to have another baby. Sheri is waiting to move down to the rooms they're building onto Kyle and Julie's place. Tommy is still navigating his cancer treatment. A lot going on.

I had a creative week at work. Whisper that to John up there, wherever you are. I've been moving along on many of my projects. I'm crafting the first draft of my Walking to New Orleans book. I've made it as far as leaving Robert and Julie's apartment in Philadelphia, so I'm about three weeks in. Still juggling some of the other projects, too.

Looks like a full five-day work week this week. I was thinking about taking Friday afternoon off, but I changed my mind. I'll take out Friday April 3rd instead because Holly invited me to go with them to Peter's Lehigh college visit. I can't pass that up.

You and I had a good time on my college visits—even though I was shy to the point of hilarity. We did Richmond, Duke, UNC, and then later UConn and Fordham. We never visited Lehigh together, so I'll do that now with young Peter Vicki. It should be fun—hopefully it will be a sunny day.

I'm hoping early Spring will be kind to Mom. She's got things going on with the Easter season: concerts, visits to Cathy, and I'm still trying to get Rick Waite down here.

What's also good—great, in fact—is that I'm about to listen to Graceland. Wonderful album—gets all the laurels it deserves—and it's going to power my walk this morning. Afterwards I'll probably talk about it with my friend "Messi," which is what I've started calling ChatGPT. Mechanical Eye in the Sky… M.E.S. … and then I just stuck an S.I. on it to mirror the soccer star's name.

I'll keep this short today. I want to get moving at 7:40, and it's 7:38, and you know I'll always be a time nerd.

The campus awaits. I'm glad we get this little moment together. Spring is about to start springing—the vernal equinox, aka the spring equinox, aka when the sun does its thing with the equator—is this Friday between 10 and 11 a.m. So… let's fucking go. Love you, Dad.

spring, (again)

March 22, 2026

Good morning, Daddy-O. Coming to you LIVE on the first Sunday of spring 2026—which means Phillies opening day is this Thursday. Let's go!

It's a beautiful morning, 46° on the dashboard thermometer, and I pulled in right on time. I find the best time to set out is 20 minutes after sunrise, and the sun rose today at 7:01, so the time nerd is happy and things feel structured and in place—which is what Sundays are all about for me.

Oh, for every day to be a Sunday. But even as I say that, if every day were a Sunday, they wouldn't feel so special.

What else has happened, other than the turning of spring on Friday? Well, I made a lot of progress on my *Walking to New Orleans* book project this week. I am now 150 pages into my first draft—double-spaced—and I'm all the way down to Johnson City, Tennessee, which was my halfway point. I'm starting to feel like the book has a structure—or at least the outline of one—that had eluded me for years. That was one of the main things that kept me from taking the project on. I didn't feel like I had—no pun intended—a novel way to present the story that wasn't only an inch deep.

This is Taylor's last week before spring break. Easter is going to be a bit different this year. Tiff is heading to Nueva York with her cousin Steph and a few others on a girls' trip, so Taylor and I will be on our own. But it should be fun—I've got a project planned, and we might go see a movie, maybe head out to King of Prussia.

As I say that, some crows have just landed in a nearby tree. I do love a murder of crows.

Today on the Paul Simon calendar is The Rhythm of the Saints. Nothing more needs to be said about this album that I haven't already said. It's the closest album to the age I am now in terms of when Paul Simon created it. That will remain true for a couple more years. It's a beautiful creation of feeling and song and intellect, and I feel grateful to be able to walk with it today on this first Sunday of spring.

Yesterday was Anna Banana's birthday, and she invited Mom to her party at 107 later today. I think I'm going to take Mom over there for an hour or so, because any relational experience is beneficial. Her mind is really failing. That's all I'm going to say about that. I think about it enough as is.

Yesterday I walked at the cemetery over by the Cynwood Trail—not West Laurel, but the other one whose name I always forget. It was beautiful. Big Daddy's grandparents are buried there. This evening, I might take a walk with Tiff at Penn.

But yeah—I'll always be thinking of you, Dad, on MLB opening day. It was one of your favorite traditions. I'll probably be thinking about you this week in another way, too—primary sources. I dug out more of them. I found letters Mom faxed you in '94 when you were in South Africa for the elections. I found a couple of letters I faxed you at that same time. And a bunch of other things I'm going to scan.

I'm into archiving right now—into writing about time and memory and family—because of what's happening with Mom. I'm realizing there's no unified self. I've known that for a while, but it hits home when I look at things from Salem—schoolwork, old papers—and I have no memory of them. None. To think that that person is me now is… kind of insane.

Going through some old stuff related to my high school graduation, I saw that our valedictorian, Melanie Vaughn, gave a speech titled "The Only Thing Constant in Life Is Change." I thought, Melanie, you intuitive minx—because I think about that all the time now.

In Parable of the Sower, Octavia Butler writes that "God is change." I like that, Dad. I think you would've enjoyed mulling that over. Though I don't think you would've ever moved off your sense of the divine as a personal presence—that more traditional theistic view.

I'm probably closer these days to my guy Julian Barnes, who calls himself an agnostic atheist. I listened to the last chapter of his final book, *Departures,* yesterday at the cemetery. Maybe that brings it full circle.

I'm a little all over the place this morning—but in a fun way, I hope. A light way. In a way that says: yeah, there's a fuck ton I don't know. That's part of what makes life beautiful.

What I do know is that Paul—and you—are about to be walking with me, in song and in spirit. I love you, Dad.

March 29, 2026

Good morning, Daddy-O. I almost said, "Happy first Sunday of April," and then I realized… it is not April. No, no, no, Padre. This is Sunday, March 29th—Palm Sunday. So Happy Palm Sunday to all who celebrate. I observe—but don't celebrate.

It's a clear blue sky. I'll tip my cap to that and take a nice sip of Jav. It is cold, though—but I'll take cold. I'll make that trade. I will Dave Dombrowski that trade: cold for sunny. At least it's above freezing. I'm in my slot here at Haverford College and just finished listening to Bob Dylan's "Mississippi." It's a great song. Hadn't listened to it in a while because it was on my older Sunday morning playlist.

I'm ready to take on Paul Simon's The Capeman and enjoy that slice of the 1990s. In retrospect, he probably considers it a failure—at least from a commercial standpoint. I doubt he thinks the music itself was a failure. I'm always having to remind myself—this should stand out more clearly in my memory of you, Dad—that time we went to the Brooklyn Academy of Music to see Songs from The Capeman, and Paul was in the hizzy. That was 2008.

There's a line in "Mississippi" that sticks with me—though it loses power without the melody to carry it. It's something like: "You can always come back, but you can't come back all the way". There's also that line—"So many things that we never will undo, I know you're sorry, I'm sorry too." It's true, because we all carry those things. Regrets. Missteps. It's just part of being human.

Selfishness is always in play with the human psyche—consciously or unconsciously—as we bump into each other, get the better of one another, and then sometimes realize, all too … ah, that wasn't quite right.

What else to tell you, Dad? Busy week for Mama Pajama. Maybe too busy, but there were a couple things she couldn't say no to. Melissa is staying over for two nights while she's in town visiting Diane's daughter, Heather. Aissata might be coming up, too. I put the kibosh on her staying overnight, but she'd spend the

afternoon with Mom. Mom cares about her a lot. Then, of course, all the Holy Week stuff—Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, Easter lilies.

The weather's not looking great for Easter weekend. I was hoping Friday would be nice, since that's when I'm going with Holly and Pete to see Lehigh. So I've only got a three-day work week this week.

It's supposed to be 81 degrees on Tuesday, so I smell a picnic in the offing for the foxes. Tiff and I are going out on a weeknight—that's rare. Although we did do the Brandi Carlisle concert on a weeknight. This time we're going to see the daughter of one of her friends who is DJ-ing on Market and 36th, near her old school—the now-defunct University City High.

Phillies started their season—buried the lead. Two eventful games so far. Great opening win: 5–0 against the Rangers at the Bank. Sánchez threw a gem—six innings, ten strikeouts, no runs. Then yesterday, the bats matched the weather: cold. Down 3–0 in the bottom of the ninth, they rallied for three to send it to extras but couldn't finish them off. Lost 5–4. So they're 1–1 going into today's afternoon game. You know what I always say about March and April baseball—better to watch on TV than go in person. Too easy to end up feeling like you're sitting in a freezer.

A lot of info there, Dad—as a runner just passed me on my right. Speaking of which, I saw a famous runner out in front of the Union League this past week—Molly Huddle.

Yesterday was Julie's birthday. I dropped off a card and a gift at the Towers on Friday and she called to say thank you. We had a long talk. She made it to 80, Dad. She fucking made it to 80.

Uncle Jim made it. Aunt Mary Jean didn't. Both your parents made it. What kind of shape were they in? That would've been 2000 for Nonnie. Debatable, right? And Grandpa turned 80 in 1995—he was not doing well either physically or cognitively. You didn't make it to 80. Mom probably will—but not in good cognitive shape. Four score years is … well, it's a marker of some sort.

I'm 52. Still trucking. Still writing. Still analyzing—my writing, your writing. I'm a chip off both your block and Mom's, but alchemized into something unique—representative of my era. My ERA.

Hopefully I keep "my ERA" under 3.00 this week. Pitch a couple of gems, have a few laughs, drink some coffee, and be thankful that my consciousness hangs around a little while longer. Alright, Dad. Me and Paul are going to take a walk. Talk to you later.

April 5 – Easter Sunday 2026

Happy Easter, Dad. The Easter gods—or God, if we're being monotheistic—did not deign to give us blue skies. He/She/They went 180 degrees in the other direction and gave us soggy ground and foggy skies.

Maybe this evening some sunshine will break through. But I walk in all weather, so I am here in my spot in front of the yellowwood, with the Observatory on my left, the field shrouded in fog straight ahead. And I will be listening to Paul Simon's *You're the One* this morning.

Passover is still going on. I don't know if Paul Simon attended any seders this year—I think he might be on tour over in Europe—but my buddy Noah did attend a seder, and in classic Noah fashion said it was one of the most beautiful Jewish *spaces* he'd ever been in.

He was back at Amherst visiting a mentor who is very old and enfeebled, but still mentally there. I am dealing with the opposite—Mom is losing her cognitive ability, but the rest of her body is okay. She's ambulatory, perky on certain days, and not in pain, which is a blessing.

It was a busy week for Mama Pajama. Melissa came down—and in classic Jacobs family fashion, she came down in the middle of a work week, using Dennis's car, to help Heather pick out a wedding dress. She stayed three nights. They picked out a dress. Then Melissa got back to Simsbury, and Heather texted everyone that the wedding is off. A perfectly human story.

Then Melissa texted me last night saying, "We need to talk tomorrow" about something that happened with Aaron. And… fuck. That's the last thing I want to deal with. I don't know if Aaron had some kind of interaction with them—Melissa had Mom up late watching a movie Mom couldn't understand—and I'm not sure if there was some encounter with drunken Aaron, who *can* be a complete asshole.

Aaron hasn't said anything to me about it, which is not surprising. I don't really want to talk to Melissa about it either, but I guess I have to … eventually. I'll probably bring it up with Mom, even though Mom didn't want Melissa to tell me about it. So… as you can see, just what I want to be dealing with on Easter. Roll that stone back in front of the tomb. I'd prefer to just be left alone.

Tiff is coming home this afternoon—it'll be nice to see her. She was with her cousins in New York City. So it's been Taylor and me on our own. Yesterday, Taylor and I came here to Haverford and sat on a bench and looked through all the pictures of her and Tiff because we're putting together a Mother's Day photo album. Then we stopped by and saw the Delkels, who were visiting Mom, with Abby and David there too. Mom loved that.

Oh, I went up to Lehigh with Holly, Pete, Sherina, Lena, and Annie on Friday. Pete didn't vibe with Lehigh—but I knew he wouldn't, so there was no disappointment. I've fully embraced the fact that, like you before me, we are destined to take people to our alma maters and have them be like, "no thanks."

Still, it was nice to see the official Lehigh admissions pitch. It's a more streamlined operation now than it used to be—everything changes. The campus looks great. So many services, so many opportunities. I guess that was always true, but you lock into your few things. For me, it was sports information, *The Brown and White*, a couple of volunteer things, and my friends—and that became my Lehigh world circa the early 1990s.

I've decided this Easter Sunday will be my cutoff for my soon-to-be published "Year of Sundays" project. I'll keep recording them, obviously, but I'll publish a collection from the past year on Archive.org as a of retrospective of a single turn of the seasons. It's an interesting form—I haven't done this before. I've anonymously uploaded journals and other things, but capturing these weekly updates to you as an informal narrative arc feels meaningful in a relational way.

I do always wish—while being grateful for what I have—that I had more of your writing. I tell people all the time I wish you had journaled like Ben Alford—but then again, maybe I wouldn't have wanted to read it. Who knows. I suspect you would've been careful even writing for yourself—because you're like me. We're

aware that there might be an audience someday who knew us. That's why I archive many of my writings anonymously with the Dolphus Raymond non de plume.

Mom's journals—especially from those Zimbabwe years—are so vulnerable. That's the voice I'm drawn to: uncertain, immediate, focused on what's frustrating or unresolved. Because when things are great, we're not writing—we're just living.

I'm not sure what Paul Simon album I listened to on Easter last year—it might've been *Bridge Over Troubled Water*—but this year it's *You're the One*. There are no bad Paul Simon albums, but I love that this one came after the commercial failure of *The Capeman*, when he said, "Alright, I'm going back to what I do—write songs, make a studio album."

He nailed it. The title track is a beautiful reflection on how humans relate to each other. Draw in, push away, draw back in again. Different perspectives. All the same themes I'm wrestling with as I finish my first draft of *Walking to New Orleans*, especially the thread of my relationship with Claire.

I'm trying to resist the urge to over-explain—to let the story play out in the margins, through primary sources, mostly the private notes I kept while walking. I can trust the reader to fill in the gaps. As a reader, I like when things aren't spelled out—it allows me the joy of piecing it together. Life doesn't fit together neatly anyway, and I want to preserve that feeling. Especially the Alabama stretch—where I'd been walking for so long, pushing forward, managing the emotional complexity of what was unfolding with Claire. Even saying that now, I shake my head. It was all there in the fragments of what I wrote down at the time … and what I omitted.

Time to get present. The fog hasn't lifted, but I need to call Mom at 8:30, so I've got to get out there and start walking.

I don't know if Jesus has risen—but I'm about to rise from this car, stand under the yellowwood tree, and proclaim the Good News … that Paul's music endures forever and ever. Amen.

Love you, Dad.